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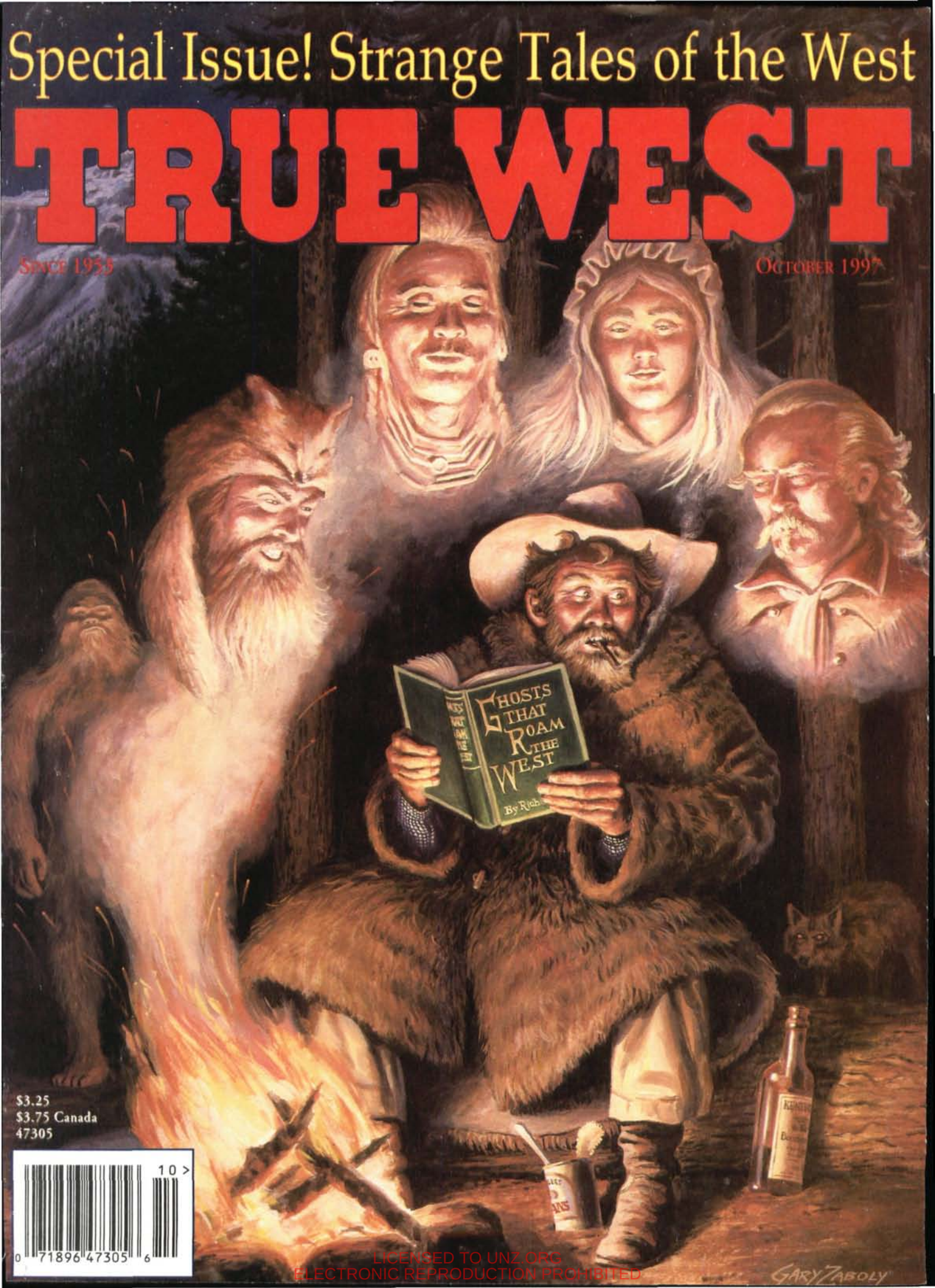


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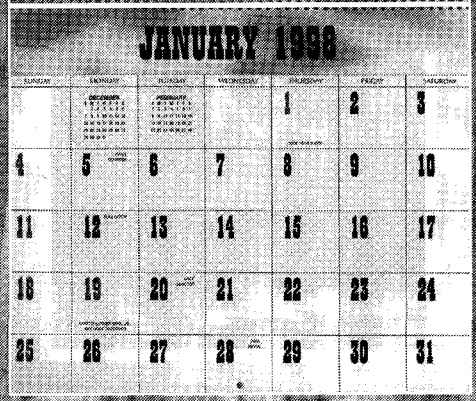

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# TRUE WEST

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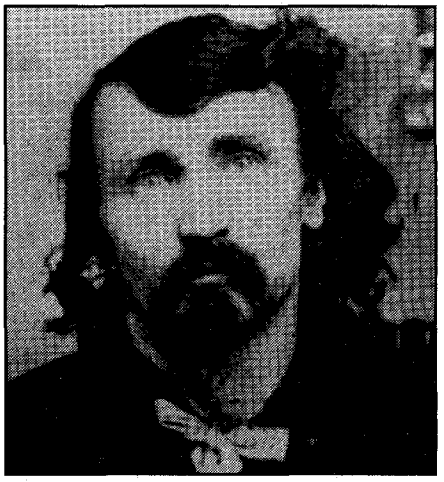

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## Our Cover

*Ghosts Around the Campfire*
By Gary Zaboly

**Editor's Note:** Due to the number of stories in this issue, "*True West* Legends" and "Wild Old Days" were omitted for space. These columns will continue in their regular positions next issue. Also, our Truth Wagon, which ends each story, has been replaced with a more fitting emblem for this issue.

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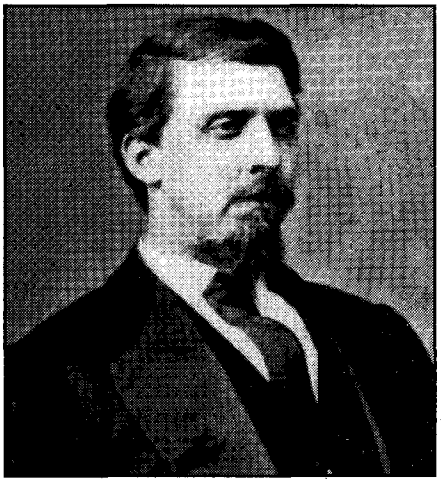

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# FROM THE EDITOR

Howdy, ya'll!

By now you've seen the cover, read the contents page, and you are probably muttering to yourself, "Just what in the hell are those boys down at *True West* trying to do?" Let me just say right off the bat, that we are having some fun, plain and simple.

Now, you all know by now that I take a different view of history, especially history of the West. I know that getting the facts right is important, and I know that each piece of research is sacred and deserves a certain amount of respect. But I also know that sometimes you have to plant your tongue firmly in your cheek and have fun with history. After all, some of the subjects themselves were pretty humorous folks. It took a certain amount of levity to survive in a wild and ruthless frontier.

A few months ago I sent out a call for western ghost stories and tales of the supernatural. I wasn't sure we would get any responses from our writers, but I was dead wrong. It seems that each writer I approached had come across a strange tidbit somewhere in their research, but had filed it away as a novelty. What makes these stories interesting to me is that so many of them reflect upon the traditions and the people who settled the West. Our ancestors not only brought their dreams and families across the oceans and prairies seeking a new life, but also their regional superstitions and folklore. Combine those myths with Native American beliefs and the West could be a downright spooky place on a cold and lonely night.

As a kid, when I wasn't reading tales of the West, I usually had my face stuck in a scary comic book. I still have a big box full of 'em, and I'm sure those youthful nights spent under the covers with a flashlight reading about ghost and ghouls has led me to be the jumpy person that I am today.

A few years back, two of my friends and I took a leave from our military duties to get in a weekend of fishing and camping. We packed our gear in the pickup, loaded our Thermos with coffee, and headed out on the backroads of California. Weren't sure where we were going, just needed to get away from the base for a while.

Somewhere on a lonesome, dark stretch of road between San Jose and Bakersfield, the conversation turned to scary stories. We passed the hours swapping yarns about ghost cars, mysterious lights in the sky, and anything else we could remember from our youth. We were in the middle of a tale about an unsolved murder that had occurred on that very road, when our conversation was interrupted by the strangest scratching sound coming from behind the truck.

Hopping out of the cab, my buddy and I walked to the tailgate to discover that one of our fishing poles had flopped out and was being dragged down the highway, its line tangled around the back bumper. Cursing our buddy still in the truck, who had loaded the gear, we went to work cutting the line and walking back down the road looking for anything else we might have lost. All of a sudden our friend from the truck let out a blood-curdling scream. "Get back in the truck! There's something in the brush!"

The two of us spun toward the side of the road just in time to see a large object lift up and peek at us over the top of a bush. It dropped out of sight as we hopped in the truck, the hair on the back of our necks standing on end. Looking back, we saw our "monster" in the moonlight as we sped away. Smiles spread across our faces and we laughed as we realized what it was. It's still out there in the California desert, looking over the brush menacingly at those foolish enough to stop on dark and lonely nights.

I'll never look at a simple oil-field pump the same way again.

Marcus Huff



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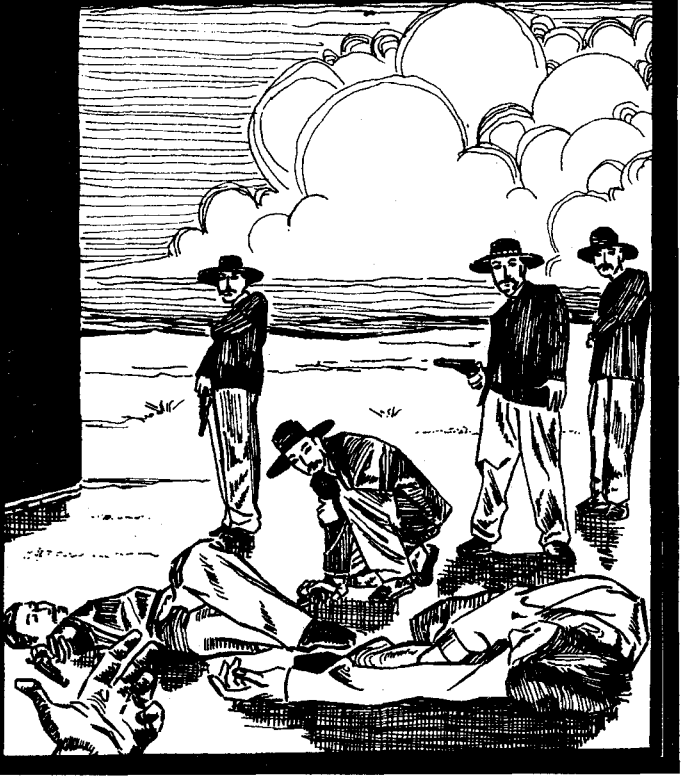
# WEST SKETCH

## BY ADAM WALLENTA

# THE TOMBSTONE SAGA: FINALE

OCTOBER 26, 1881, TOMBSTONE, COCHISE COUNTY, TERRITORY OF ARIZONA—As the cowboys, Ike and Billy Clanton, Tom and Frank McLaury, talk over their plans in the lot behind the OK Corral, Wyatt, Virgil, and Morgan Earp and Doc Holliday venture down the street to "disarm" the group. Sheriff John Behan pleads with the Earps not to start a fight but is brushed aside by the Earps. Tense seconds pass at the lot as each group weighs the situation. In less than thirty seconds, Billy Clanton and Tom and Frank McLaury lie either dead or dying. Morgan, Doc, and Virgil are wounded, but walk away from the fight. Wyatt remains unscratched, as does Ike Clanton, who flees the scene, leaving his brother to die.





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# LITTLE GREEN MEN & PAT GARRETT

As all good *True West* readers know, Sheriff Pat Garrett was shot and killed by one Wayne Brazel in 1908 in New Mexico.

What I want to know is if Wayne Brazel was related in one way or another to Mac Brazel, whose ranch in the Corona, New Mexico, area was the purported site of the Roswell UFO crash in 1947?

If you or one of your staff cannot answer my question, maybe one of your readers can.—*Leo E. Tracy, Carlsbad, New Mexico.*

**Editor's Note:** History is a strange book indeed. Mac was the nephew of Wayne Brazel, the self-proclaimed trigger man at Garrett's execution. I like to think that those aliens were stopping in to buy some Billy the Kid postcards when their vehicle crashed smack in the middle of Brazel's ranch. Stranger things have happened.

### A Cocked Pistol

Yours is a very enjoyable magazine, as are the books offered. Several have been ordered and read, but there is need to comment for safety's sake on *Triggernometry*. The last chapter deals with handling a single action revolver. There are several basic safety rules that are violated, and if anybody reads this good book, just do not do what the author suggests.

Never practice any kind of quick draw. I met a man who tried it and shot himself in the leg. I have been shooting pistols for about forty years and am only what I call a "fair shot."

The most important thing to remember is to be safe with firearms. They are not playtoys.—*A.C. Hall, Jr., Wake Forest, North Carolina.*

**Editor's Note:** Keen advice my friend. It's always a good idea to use your head when handling firearms. Fancy spins and gun tricks may have worked for Curly Bill in a pinch, but doing it just for fun might earn ya the nickname Toeless Johnny.

### Anchors Aweigh

Please continue my subscription to *True West* and *Old West*. Please note the address change, I'll be retiring from the Navy after 20 years and don't want to miss an issue.

Your magazines have filled many a boring time at sea, and have always been a bit of home. (I've read *True West* since I was a kid.)

There ain't a durn thing wrong with "Howdy, ya'll." Those people who don't like it have been sucking lemons. Keep up the great work! Hope to visit ya'll one day.—*Tracey Havard, United States Navy.*

### Read It Slower

I have had my subscription to *True West* for I don't know how long. My grandmother bought my first subscription, and that's what I always got from her for Christmas.

My only complaint is that the day I get *True West* I read it from cover to cover and have to wait for the next issue. Keep up the good work.—*A.M. Gies, Longmont, Colorado.*

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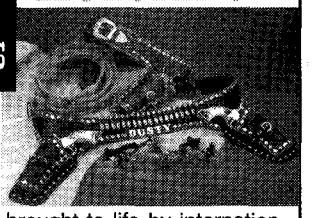

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**Howdy Lawdog!**

Hah Yuh Din? Eastern translation of "Howdy Y'all."

In these days of right and left coasts' radicalism, email, faxes, "have yours call mine," drive through banking, and reading the newspaper on the Internet, let those without courtesy, friendliness, and a sense of appreciation for history read the *New Yorker* or *LA Times.*

Let the Marcus Huffs extend greetings to those of us who still either live in or long for the neighborly and courtesy traditions of the West. Sometimes tradition is not a bad thing. Happy trails.—*R.C. Van Raalte, president, Law Enforcement Memorial Association, Roselle, Illinois.*

**Editor's Note:** Ahh, shucks. I appreciate your vote for my homegrown greeting, Mr. Van Raalte, but let's not get too carried away.

I seem to recall reading a real good article about a bluegrass banjo player in the *New Yorker* once. That's the recipe for a fine mag in my book.

**Norias Battle**

In the August issue, Sandy McCutchan asked about the Norias Battle. I'm sure by now that you have the answer to her question.

The article appeared in the June 1982 issue of *True West* under the title, "Sneak Attacks and Murder," by John Peavey. The article comes from a book by Peavey, *Echoes from the Rio Grande,* published in 1993.

I'm sure that this information has been reported, but if not, I hope you will find it useful.—*Don Bryan, Bishop, Texas.*

**John Middleton**

Can you please tell me where John Middleton is buried? I've tried and tried, but can't find his grave.—*Rick Post, Fort Smith, Arkansas.*

**Editor's Note:** John Middleton, a Tunstall partisan in the Lincoln County War, apparently faded from the limelight after his time in NEw Mexico.

According to Frederick Nolan's *The Lincoln County War: A Documentary History,* Middleton died of smallpox in San Lorenzo, New Mexico, in November 1882.

If this information is correct then Middleton may be buried in San Lorenzo. However, there is no mention of Middleton's final resting place in Jim Browning's guide to historical graves, *Violence Was No Stranger.* Maybe a reader can help us out on this one.

Your letters and comments are welcome. Please keep letters to 300 words or less. All letters received by Western Publications will be considered for publication unless otherwise stipulated in the letter. Space does not permit us to print all letters we receive. Be sure to include full name, address, and zip code. Photos are welcome. Address all letters to Western Publications, PO Box 2107, Stillwater, OK 74076. E-mail us at, Western@cowboy.net. Due to the volume of mail, we cannot forward correspondence to people whose letters appear in "Truly Western."


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***SAN JOSE'S WINCHESTER HOUSE IS NOT ONLY A SPOOKY MANSION, IT WAS SPOOKED TO BEGIN WITH. IT WAS BUILT AS A HOME FOR GHOSTS.***

# A HAUNT FOR HAUNTS

If you know the way to San Jose, California, follow it for a most unusual experience. San Jose's Winchester House is not only a spooky mansion, it was spooked to begin with. It was built as a home for ghosts.

Gargantuan in size, the structure is not only dark, dank, and drafty as befits a spirit abode, but its chill factors have terrestrial justification as well. It is no longer economically feasible to heat a home that sprawls over six acres, contains 160 rooms, forty stairways, three elevators, forty-seven fireplaces, 2,000 doors, 10,000 windows, and more closets, turrets, and crannies than one can remember two minutes after hearing their numbers.

Located fifty miles southeast of San Francisco, the Winchester Mystery House's main claim to fame in the realm of hypernormal homesteads goes beyond such attributes as form and frigidity. It is probably the only one of its kind in that it was built by architectural mandates emanating from "the other side."

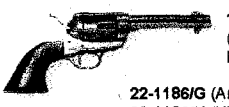
To comply with those dictates took a program that went on daily for thirty-eight years (1885-1922), at a cost of five and a half million dollars, and changed a former belle from New Haven, Connecticut, into a western recluse.

Sarah Pardee was the name of the woman who was controlled by a battalion of spirits whose whims had to be satisfied to confuse "the enemies." And she might have refused to marry William Wirt Winchester, of the family associated with the famous rifle, had she been able to foresee how that weapon would curse her life.

Labeled as "The Gun That Won the West," and reputed to have caused the death of thousands of men, women, and children, the firearm was a continuous subject for New Haven's wagging tongues who referred to the Winchester fortune as "blood money" and predicted retribution would have to be made.

Popular and petite Sarah, who weighed only ninety-five pounds and stood under five-feet tall, seems to have paid little attention, however, and she married William in

By Mary McKernan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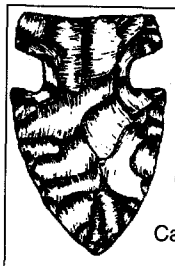

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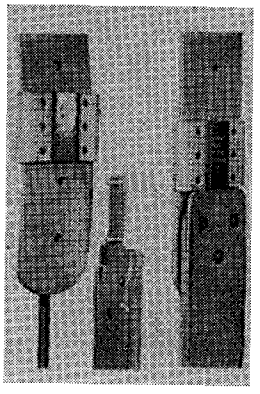

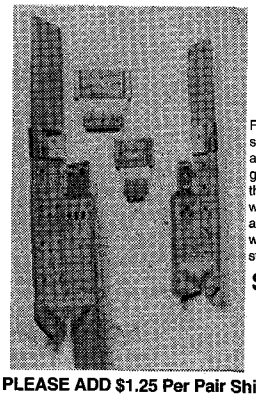

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1862. But several years later when her only child, Annie, died in infancy, and William, too, met an untimely death, she began to be plagued by the notion that the gossips had been right. Her loved ones were now being persecuted since they were face-to-face with all who had been slain by the Winchester rifle.

Concern for their welfare drove her to consult a Boston psychic hoping to have her fears put to rest. Instead, the news was even more devastating. According to the medium, William and Annie were suffering the torments of the damned, but that was only a part of their fate. Their deaths had actually been engineered by vindictive forces, who were now planning to do away with Sarah since she was the present heir to the Winchester fortune.

There was only one ray of hope to avoid the clutches of the evil ones, Sarah was told. Their tactics were not condoned by all those felled by the rifle. Certain sources wished to make it known they were not only willing to forgive but to take on the task of protecting all family members from revenge-seeking entities if she would agree to move west (that part of the country most victimized by the rifle), buy a house for her descarnate friends, and keep building on it continuously in accordance to blueprints provided from above. As long as construction went on, she was assured, she would continue to live and the souls of her departed would rest in peace.

Why Sarah settled in an eight-room farmhouse in the Santa Clara Valley of San Jose is not clear. And there seems to be a dispute over why she gradually became so withdrawn that she refused to see anyone who came to the house (including President Teddy Roosevelt), or why she swathed herself in veils when dealing with all of the household staff except her live-in secretary and niece, Margaret Marriam, and the Chinese butler who served their meals.

Some historians believe Sarah isolated herself because it became too confounding shuttling between the company of mortals and spirits and her commitment left her only one choice. But others feel her withdrawal from society was simply a reaction to the treatment accorded her by townsfolk unsympathetic to the erratic construction taking place on the Winchester property.

It certainly was enough to promote unease. The two-story house began to rise to seven stories and was sprouting out in all directions like some creeping tumor. Even worse, its form was in a continual state of flux. What was finished one day was apt to be torn down the next or engulfed in additional layers of wood and glass.

The fluidity of design reflected a mindlessness to neighbors. And there were those who had seen the interior who swore it confirmed the owner's daffiness. With winding, twisting corridors snaking in and out of such a maze of rooms, servants needed maps to find their way around. There were bizarre stairways leading up to ceilings, doors that opened onto blank walls or fifty-foot drops; spiderweb patterns incorporated into most walls and windows; and an absolute preoccupation with the number thirteen. There were 13 bathrooms, 13 panels in the walls of most rooms, 13 lights on chandeliers, and even 13 hooks for robes in the seance room where it was alleged the demented woman went every night for conferences with her other-worldly architects.

The seance room in itself indicated madness. Who in her right mind would spend each night listening to "good-guy ghosts" discuss how to baffle the bad guys with tomorrow's blueprints?

Sarah's actions generated even more gossip during the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The tremor toppled the upper three stories of the house and it was feared she had been killed by the wreckage. Nobody knew for sure where she had been sleeping because it was her habit to retire to a different one of the forty bedrooms each night to elude the evil spirits. She was found at last, unharmed, but trapped by a



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wall which had shifted, jamming a door.

Earthquake damage once again caused the contour of the house to change, for Sarah believed that the devastation occurred because she had misinterpreted orders and built too high, and that she had been overly extravagant with that part of the house which contained a grand ballroom and Tiffany stained glass doors and windows. So, she issued orders that the front thirty rooms were to be closed off and that the height never again exceed four stories.

Sarah remains an anomaly to this day. There's plenty of reason to doubt her sanity, and yet, attesting to a sound mind are several household innovations she introduced which were hailed by contractors in many parts of the country. Beside installing an intercom system in every room (the result of her earthquake entrapment), she had magnifying glass inserts placed in many windows facing the gardens, enabling her to see plants and trees in detail. She initiated the use of cranks to control outside shutters and hinged fireplace drops to catch ashes. And she held the patent for a porcelain scrub board molded into a laundry sink.

The Winchester Mystery House is located at the intersection of Winchester Boulevard and I-880 in San Jose, California. Hours of operation are 9AM until 8PM daily, rain or shine.

Guided tours of 110 rooms of the Winchester mansion are given every ten minutes, with each tour lasting just over an hour. The mansion also offers a guided "flashlight" tour of the grounds during the evenings. Admission prices are $12.95 for adults; $9.95 for seniors; $6.95 for children ages five to twelve years; and children under five are admitted for free.

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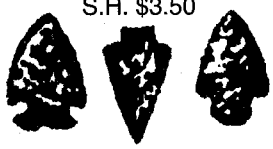

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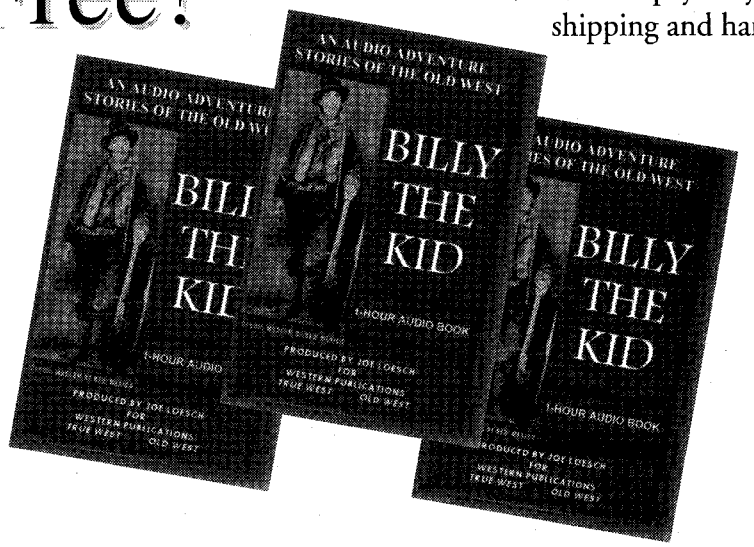


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# TRAILS GROWN DIM

**Adkins**

We are looking for information about my great-uncle, John (Jack) William Adkins, who worked on a ranch near Berino, New Mexico, from 1914 to 1915. We have a picture of him in a cowboy outfit and a letter home to his sister telling how they had to "dig wood" for heat at night and describing the Elephant Butte Dam that was being built nearby.

He sent his girlfriend in Maryland several photos of the area. John also sent her several pictures of an ostrich farm. The photos look like they were bought at a demonstration, but there is no indication where they were taken. I understand there were ostrich farms in southeastern and eastern New Mexico and near El Paso at the time. This ranch could be anywhere in the Southwest because John attended the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in August 1915.

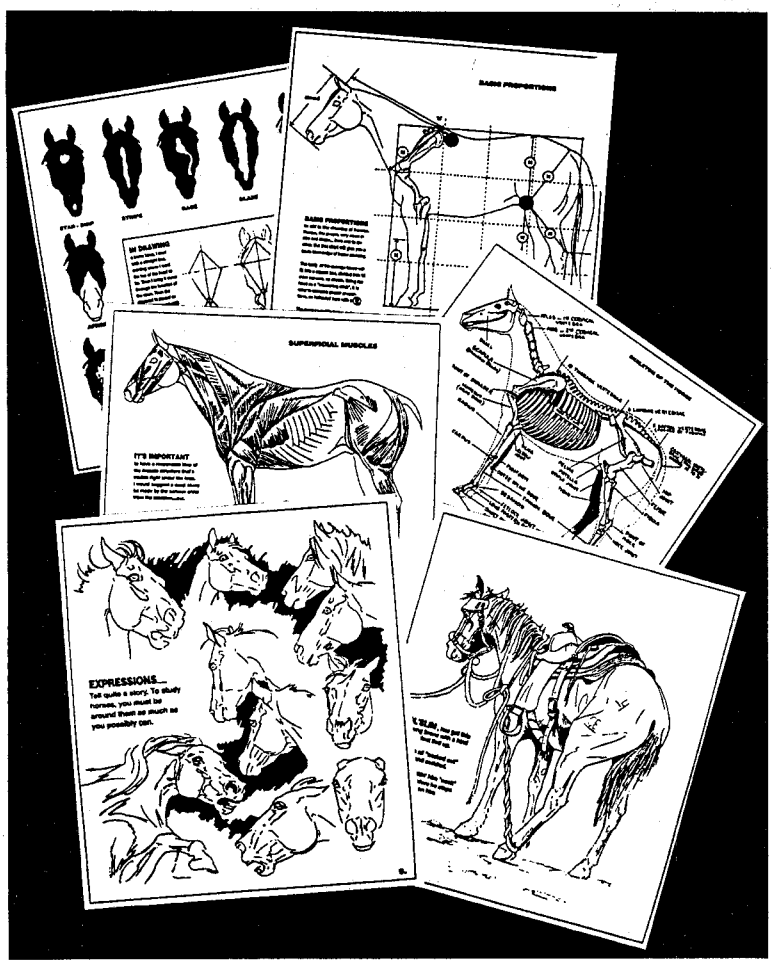
Author's Photo

John William Adkins as he looked while in New Mexico.

John Adkins was born September 24, 1889, in Parsonsburg, Maryland, and worked on the Panama Canal before going to New Mexico in his mid-twenties. From there, he went to California, Montana, and Alaska before disappearing in Russia in 1927.

I can supply copies of the ostrich farm photos if anyone can identify them. If anyone can identify John, or the places he worked or visited, please contact me.—**Hazel A. Garland, 415 Plainview Avenue, Edgewater, Maryland 21037-3334.**

Reader's letters for "Trails Grown Dim" are published as soon as time permits, so please be patient. Please print or type your query and limit letters to 150 words or less. Photographs are welcome. We can't run current "missing persons" notices or lengthy geneological requests, but we do attempt to print all letters. If you have any information, please communicate directly with the letter writer; please don't write us.

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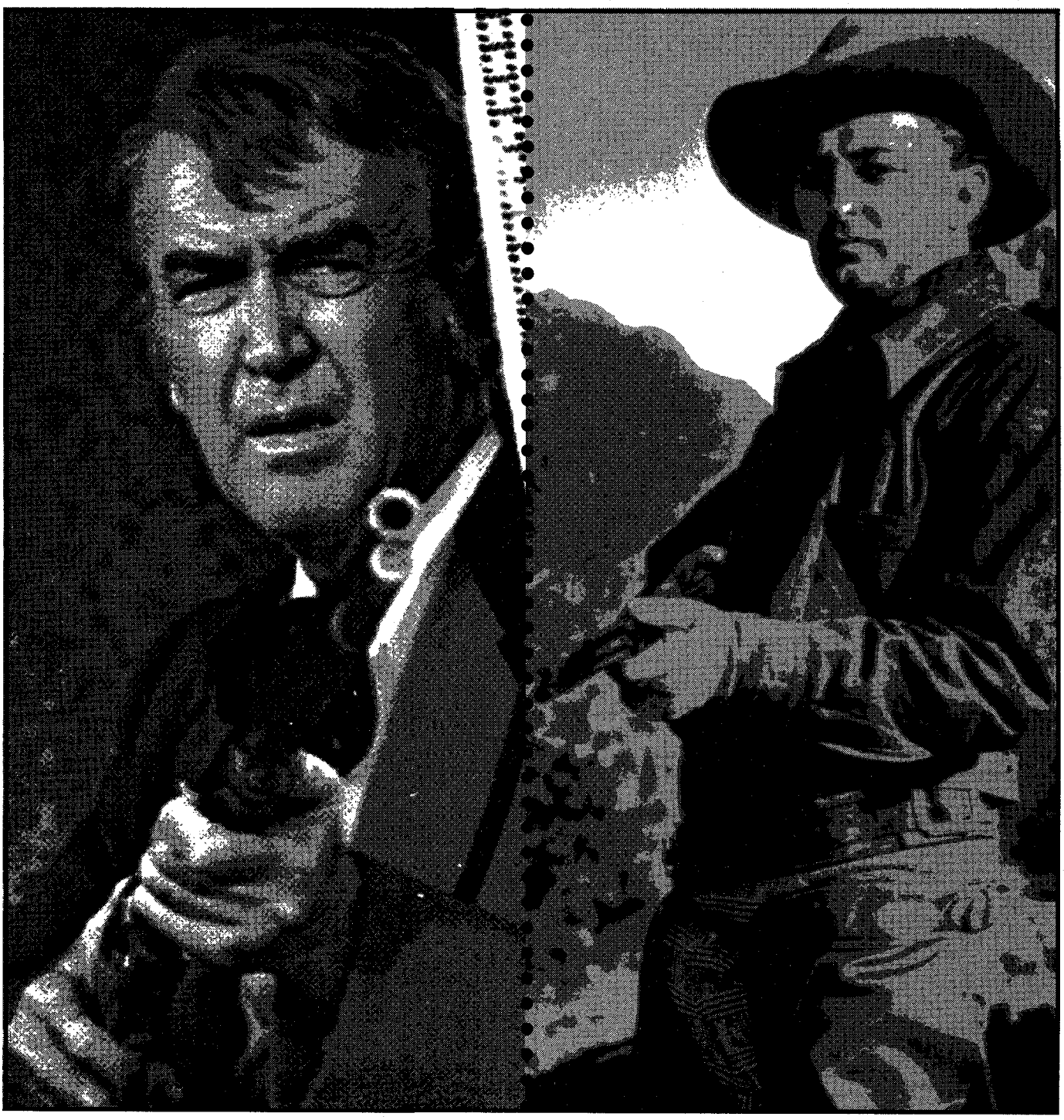
# HAPPY TRAILS

During the production of this issue, we were saddened by the loss of two Hollywood giants. James Stewart and Robert Mitchum shared the silver screen with the likes of John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and Lee Marvin in what were perhaps the greatest western films ever made. Stewart starred in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, Winchester 73, How the West Was Won,* and *The Shootist,* to name but a few. Mitchum got his start in Hopalong Cassidy films and went on to star in many westerns, including *Night of the Hunter, Blood on the Moon,* and most recently, *Dead Man.* Their talents will be sorely missed.

Photos courtesy of the Glenn Shirley Collection.



**JAMES STEWART** **ROBERT MITCHUM**



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# The Ghost of Willow Springs Station

By Harold L. Edwards

One day in 1859 a stagecoach of the Butterfield line left Visalia, California, the county seat of Tulare County and the only town on the San Joaquin Valley floor between Stockton and Los Angeles, for its regular run south. The coach horses were changed on schedule at the way-stations of Packwood, Tule River, and Fountain Springs. The trip was uneventful until the coach arrived at Mountain House which was also known as Willow Springs Station. The hostler was not waiting in the yard with the relay horses ready for change as expected. The stagecoach driver was uneasy with the unexpected developments, and he went into the nearby barn to see if he could find the man. He found the relay horses harnessed and ready for change, and he also found the hostler lying on the floor—dead. The story that followed was bizarre and incredible, and it became one of Tulare County's most favored ghost stories.

Several years earlier, Jason Hillerson arrived in Visalia, and he was immediately popular. He was obviously well-educated and cultured, and he was approachable and friendly. He conversed freely, but it was noted that the topics of his conversations were always of his past travels and never related to himself. He was believed to be a foreigner as he spoke with a brogue, but it wasn't determined if his accent was Scottish or Irish. He was somewhat mysterious, and some thought he might be a man who was hiding from his past. However, no one asked him personal questions as it wasn't considered polite or safe to do that in those days. To make matters more intriguing, Hillerson accepted employment with the Butterfield stagecoach line as a hostler at Willow Springs Station, an isolated post which was only a horse change relay depot manned by one employee. The dead man on the floor of the Willow Springs station barn was Jason Hillerson.

According to the legend, one of the stagecoach passengers was a physician, and he examined the body of the deceased; however, he could find no cause for Hillerson's sudden demise. Hillerson's remains were transported to Visalia where a coroner's inquest into his death was held. It was thought that some of Hillerson's drinking binges, about four times a year, might have effected his heart. The coroner's jury determined that Jason died from heart failure; a natural cause. His remains were buried in the local cemetery.

A few weeks prior to Hillerson's death, another stranger arrived in Visalia. He spoke with the same brogue as Hillerson although no one made a connection between the two men. The stranger was free with buying the drinks. He was well-educated and appeared to be wealthy. He said he was in the area looking for property bargains, and he took numerous trips about the area looking at land. He was in Visalia when Hillerson's body arrived there, and he attended the coroner's inquest. He seemed touched by the sad demise of the hostler and he paid for Hillerson's funeral and watched the burial. Soon after the funeral, the stranger said he didn't find what he was looking for in the area and left town. The mysterious stranger was soon forgotten.

The Butterfield company sent an acquaintance of Hillerson's to replace him at the Willow Springs station. After dinner of the second day on the job, the hostler sat by his lamp and enjoyed an evening smoke from his tobacco pipe. He glanced at the door, which had a window in its upper part, and he saw Jason Hillerson staring at him through the window from outside. The hostler stared back, spellbound, and then Hillerson, or his spectre, faded from view. The astonished hostler paced the floor of his cabin, and he said:

"What a fool I am; it was a cat or something. There cannot be anything out there, at least it is not Jason for he is dead!" He regained his courage and went outside to look around. He saw nothing.

The hostler breathed a sigh of relief, and then he went into the stable to see if all was well. He was surprised to see two horses in a nearby stall wet with sweat, and they were



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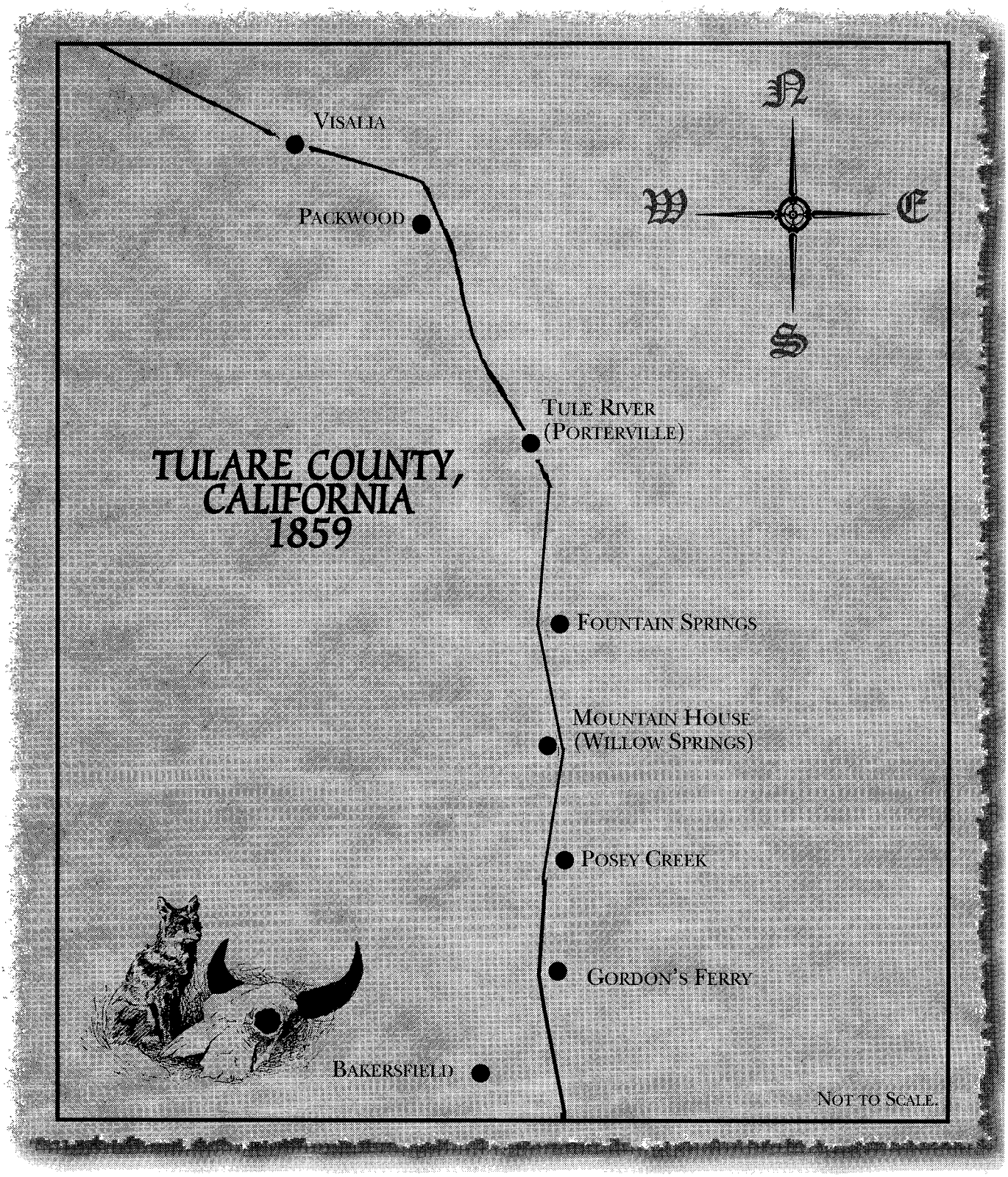
nervous and excited. There was no apparent reason for this condition, and the the hostler thought the horses might be sick. He got some cloths from a work box and started back to the horses to rub them down. At this point he clearly saw Jason Hillerson walk into the barn and get a curry comb, a scraper, and some cloths from the work box and go to a nearby horse. Hillerson started to rub the animal down with the cloth, but the horse, sensing something eerie, became agitated and nervous. It whinnied and trembled, and then it began to buck and plunge. Hillerson at-tempted to calm the beast by saying: "Whoa,




from author's map

The Butterfield stagecoach route in Tulare County at the time of the murder of Jason Hillerson.



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Bill. Whoa, my beauty." However, the more Hillerson tried to calm the horse the more unruly it became. The horse's skittishness was spreading to the other horses in the barn. While the hostler stood terror-stricken, Hillerson abandoned his chore and replaced the tools in the work box. He then left the barn through the same door he entered.

The terrified hostler left the station that night and went to Visalia. He presented his resignation to company officials and reported the happenings of the night before. The officials tried to get him to return to the station, and they even offered him more salary if he would go. However, the poor fellow refused, and amid the scoffing and laughter of the townsmen, he left the country. However, before he left he made a prophetic statement. He said that Jason Hillerson was murdered and he would continue to hang around Willow Springs until his murderer was found.

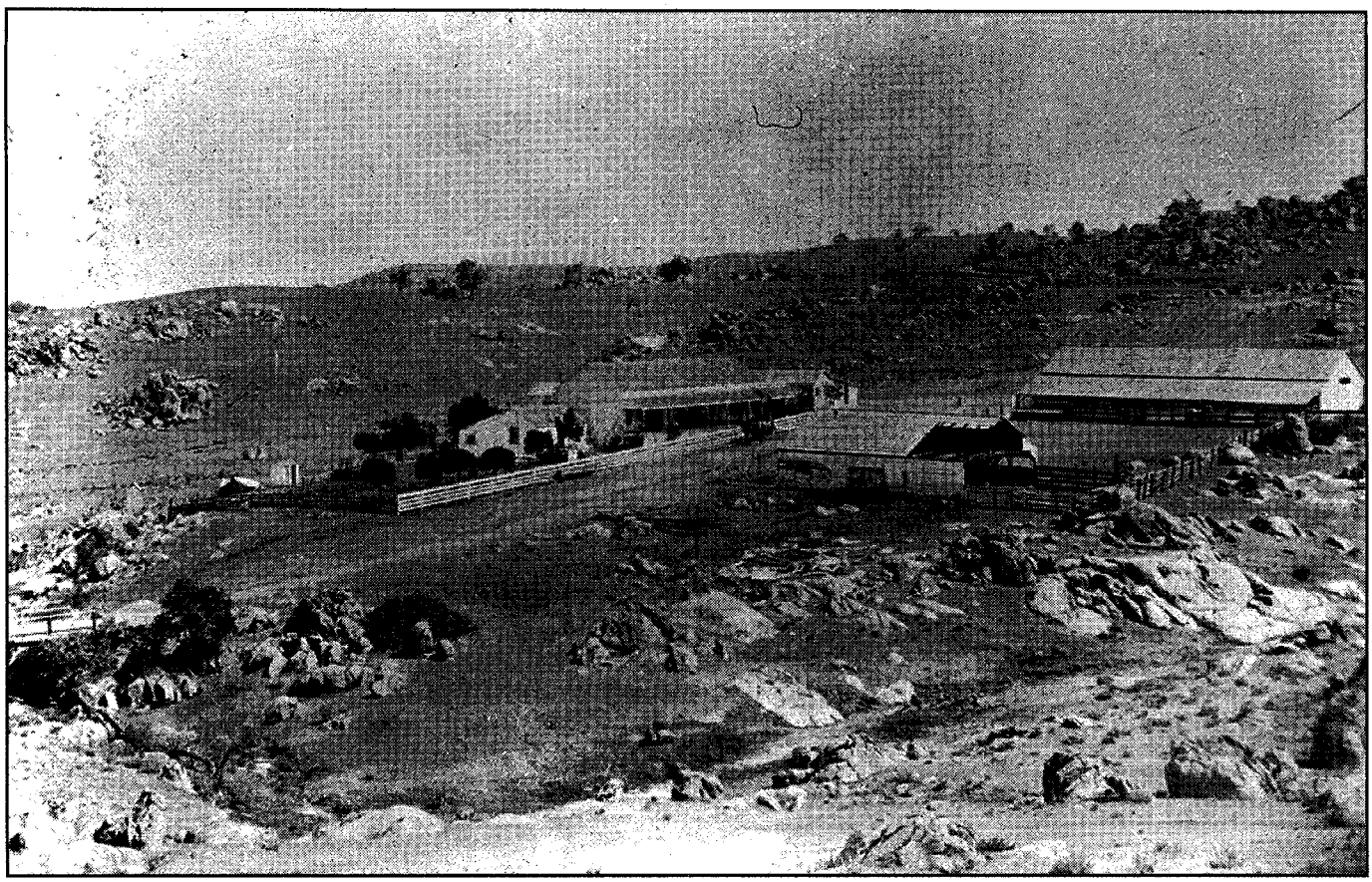
Another man assumed the hostler position at the Willow Springs station, but he only lasted a couple of days before he appeared in Visalia more frightened than the first man. He swore he saw the frightened horses in the barn kick through Hillerson's body, ghostly figure, or whatever it was, while the apparition was grooming the horses. He also refused to go back to the station, and word further spread that the springs were haunted.

Finally, two men volunteered for the job, and the stagecoach company sent them to Willow Springs as a team. Before leaving Visalia, the men bragged that they would drive the ghost into the springs. They were, according to the legend, initially successful, but Jason Hillerson then chased them all the way back to Visalia. It was said that one of the men never recovered from his fright, and thereafter the station was known as "The Haunted Springs."

In 1861, due to the Civil War, the Butterfield stagecoach company abandoned its southern route, and the stagecoach stations along its San Joaquin Valley road were no longer used. The land where the stations were located went to private ownership and the acres surrounding Willow Springs were purchased for sheep to graze. The springs were used to water the sheep; however, the sheep wouldn't drink from the springs at night. They wouldn't even come near the water. Further, Jason Hillerson made camping at the springs unpleasant—day or night. After several unsuccessful tries at ranging sheep at the springs, they were abandoned and for several years thereafter they were left to "His Ghostship."

However, in October, presumably in 1872, the ghost disappeared from Willow Springs and never returned. Rumor had it that Jason Hillerson, or his ghost, had finally found peace, and the land around the springs once more became valuable for sheep-grazing.

The mystery of Jason Hillerson's death and the haunting of Willow



Jeff Edwards Collection

The buildings in this photograph were constructed at Willows Springs after the ghost was rumored to have appeared there. The photo illustrates the isolation of Willow Springs.



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Springs was solved through an ad which allegedly appeared in the *Sacramento Union,* which was claimed to have been reprinted from a newspaper in Scotland. It read:

> NOTICE: If this should chance to reach the eye of Margaret Hillerson of Glasgow, formerly of Aberdeen, Scotland, and whose maiden name was Margaret McPherson, let her rejoice and give immediate tidings to her son, Jason Hillerson, who she was made to believe died in childbirth, but who lives and is anxious to see a mother who has never seen him. Let her not fear: her persecutor is dead, and on his death-bed confessed all. Friends of humanity are requested to aid in finding this woman or her whereabouts—or her death, and in so doing will receive the gratitude of a grateful son.

It appears that Jason Hillerson was the victim of a jealous younger brother. Their father was a successful businessman in Glasgow. Jason was industrious like his father, and with the financial assistance of his father Jason also became a successful businessman. However, Robert was an irresponsible wastrel who did not enjoy his father's confidence nor his financial assistance. Robert Hillerson was a disappointment to his father, and he must become more mature and responsible before he could count on financial help from that source. Robert became resentful, sullen, and bitter.

It chanced that Jason Hillerson became attracted to Margaret McPherson, a charming young lady, and he married her. Jason was happy, and all was going well. Jason's father loved Margaret as a daughter, but Robert was jealous of her and hated her. One day Margaret disappeared, and Jason found a note that seemed to have been written by her. It stated that Margaret had left him for someone she loved more than Jason and for this reason she promised she could not be found. Jason was heart-broken and devastated, and he became despondent and lethargic. Eventually, he left his father and his business behind and roamed the British Isles. Eventually his restlessness took him to America, and he traveled the eastern states. Although he used his true name, it appeared that he wasn't anxious to be found, and he migrated on to California and located in Visalia, which was on the fringes of the frontier. The isolation and the loneliness of the Willow Springs stagecoach station seemed to attract him, and he accepted employment there as hostler, a position beneath his past work experience and his education, which added to his mysterious aura.

In the meantime, Jason's brother, Robert, appeared to mature and through good behavior ingratiated himself with his father. The elder Hillerson set Robert in business, and Robert was successful through an out-going personality and hard work. The years went by, and one day a haggard women appeared at the elder Hillerson's home and begged to see him. When she was ushered into the house, the elder Hillerson recognized her as Jason's wife, and he made her unwelcome. However, the woman persisted, and she told the old gentleman that Robert had abducted her through physical force and as a relative had her confined in an asylum where she had only recently escaped. She also informed the elder Hillerson that some eight months after her initial confinement she gave birth to a boy, but she was informed that the baby had died in childbirth. In spite of Robert's successes, the elder Hillerson knew his daughter-in-law was telling him the truth, and he went to a nearby desk for paper and pen to change his will to delete Robert and to include Margaret. At this point, Robert entered the room and saw what was occurring. In a violent rage, Robert verbally accosted his father while his sister-in-law ran from the room and disappeared down the street. The elder Hillerson died from the attack.

Robert was now financially well-fixed with his successful business and his father's large estate, that is, if he could prove his brother, Jason, to be dead. He made a concentrated effort to locate both Margaret and Jason. He never found Margaret, but his efforts eventually took him to Visalia, California, where he learned that Jason was employed at the Willow Springs stagecoach station. Robert was the affable stranger who appeared in Visalia looking for property values and buying drinks for the crowd.

*The two men had a drink to celebrate their reunification, but Robert had drugged Jason's drink.*

Robert slipped from Visalia and went to Willow Springs where he contacted his older brother. Robert confessed his sordid actions to Jason and asked forgiveness, which Jason accorded to him. The two men had a drink to celebrate their reunification, but Robert had drugged Jason's drink. As soon as Jason was unconscious, Robert drove a thin wire through the roof of Jason's mouth into the brain. Jason died instantly. Robert carried Jason's body into the barn and left it on the floor. He harnessed the relay horses for the change with the approaching stagecoach and he left unseen for Visalia.

Robert was present when Jason's remains were delivered in Visalia. He attended the coroner's inquest and listened carefully to the testimony of the witnesses. He seemed saddened by the tragic death of the hostler, and he paid for Jason's funeral and burial, which he witnessed. With proof of Jason's death, Robert departed from Visalia and returned to his home in Scotland. From that moment on Robert lived in financial luxury, but according to



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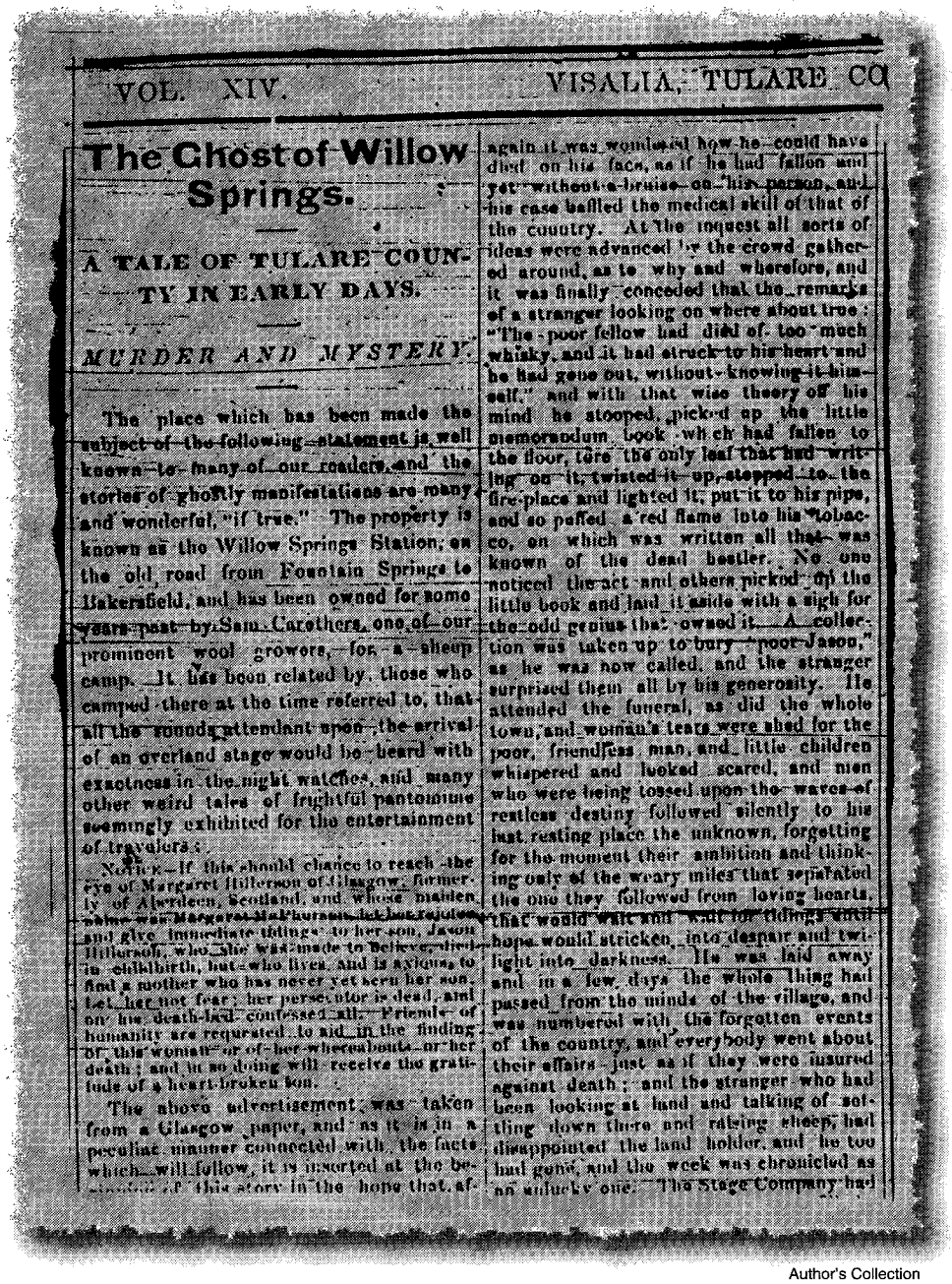

VOL. XIV. VISALIA, TULARE CO

# The Ghost of Willow Springs.

## A TALE OF TULARE COUNTY IN EARLY DAYS.

### MURDER AND MYSTERY.

The place which has been made the subject of the following statement is well known to many of our readers, and the stories of ghostly manifestations are many and wonderful, "if true." The property is known as the Willow Springs Station, on the old road from Fountain Springs to Bakersfield, and has been owned for some years past by Sam. Carothers, one of our prominent wool growers, for a sheep camp. It has been related by those who camped there at the time referred to, that all the sounds attendant upon the arrival of an overland stage would be heard with exactness in the night watches, and many other weird tales of frightful pantomime seemingly exhibited for the entertainment of travelers.

Notice.—If this should chance to reach the eye of Margaret Hillerson of Glasgow, formerly of Aberdeen, Scotland, and whose maiden name was Margaret McThurson, let her receive and give immediate tidings to her son, Jason Hillerson, who, she was made to believe, died in childbirth, but who lives. And is anxious to find a mother who has never yet seen her son. Let her not fear; her persecutor is dead, and on his death-bed confessed all. Friends of humanity are requested to aid in the finding of this woman or of her whereabouts or her death; and in so doing will receive the gratitude of a heart-broken son.

The above advertisement was taken from a Glasgow paper, and as it is in a peculiar manner connected with the facts which will follow, it is inserted at the be[illegible] of this story in the hope that, af[illegible] again it was wondered how he could have died on his face, as if he had fallen and yet without a bruise on his person, and his case baffled the medical skill of that of the country. At the inquest all sorts of ideas were advanced by the crowd gathered around, as to why and wherefore, and it was finally conceded that the remarks of a stranger looking on where about true: "The poor fellow had died of too much whisky, and it had struck to his heart and he had gone out, without knowing it himself," and with that wise theory off his mind he stooped, picked up the little memorandum book which had fallen to the floor, tore the only leaf that had writing on it, twisted it up, stepped to the fire-place and lighted it, put it to his pipe, and so puffed a red flame into his tobacco, on which was written all that was known of the dead hostler. No one noticed the act and others picked up the little book and laid it aside with a sigh for the odd genius that owned it. A collection was taken up to bury "poor Jason," as he was now called, and the stranger surprised them all by his generosity. He attended the funeral, as did the whole town, and woman's tears were shed for the poor, friendless man, and little children whispered and looked scared, and men who were being tossed upon the waves of restless destiny followed silently to his last resting place the unknown, forgetting for the moment their ambition and thinking only of the weary miles that separated the one they followed from loving hearts, that would wait and wait for tidings until hope would stricken, into despair and twilight into darkness. He was laid away and in a few days the whole thing had passed from the minds of the village, and was numbered with the forgotten events of the country, and everybody went about their affairs just as if they were insured against death; and the stranger who had been looking at land and talking of setting down there and raising sheep, had disappointed the land holder, and he too had gone, and the week was chronicled as an unlucky one. The Stage Company had

Author's Collection

The ghost of Willows Springs Station made front page news in the April 10, 1873, edition of the *Visalia Weekly Delta*.

the legend he also lived in hell's torment from a guilty conscience.

One day, by chance, Robert met a young man while walking on the street. The youth looked astonishingly like Jason Hillerson, and the resemblance unnerved Robert. He screamed; "Oh my God! It is Jason!" Robert fainted, and the youth, fearing he was somehow the cause of the attack, helped carry Robert to his nearby home. The young man waited in another room while servants attended to Robert, who recovered somewhat from his shock. He had one of his servants ask the young man to return to the home that night for a visit.

After the young man returned, as requested, Robert dismissed the servants and asked the youth his name. The young man replied that he had taken the name of "Stetson." "Taken," exclaimed Robert, "Have you no name?" "I was a foundling, who was taken from my mother at birth," responded the youth. He went on to say that he had been placed in Saint Mary's hospital and assigned the number eleven. "Oh my God!" cried Robert, and he broke down and confessed all to the young man. He told of abducting Margaret and taking her in handcuffs to the asylum; of taking her baby from her and placing it in Saint Mary's hospital as number eleven. He described his murder of Jason Hillerson and informed the youth that he, Robert, was the young man's uncle and the youth was none other than Jason Hillerson, Jr. Robert asked his nephew's forgiveness, but the young man cried, "Wretch!" and retreated to another room.

In the agony of a seizure, Robert collapsed and died, and it was Jason Hillerson who entered the room and closed the dead man's eyes. It is not known if Jason Hillerson found his lost mother, but he found his grandfather's fortune—a just reward to the whole sorry episode. This presumably occurred in October 1872, the time that the ghost of Jason Hillerson left Willow Springs, and it appeared that at last the spirit of Jason Hillerson found the peace for which it was searching.

The story of the Willow Springs ghost was printed on the front page of the April 10, 1878, edition of the *Visalia Weekly Delta*, and the narrative covered the entire page. In a special note, the newspaper's editor stated that the front-page story was published as a local interest item as the place names were familiar to residents of Tulare County and that several people the editor interviewed about the story recalled details of the event as it was still fresh in their minds. Their names were not included in the editorial.

No documentary evidence exists to confirm the death of Jason Hillerson and the haunting of Willow Springs. Was the story a hoax? If so, what was its purpose? Or was the story written and published simply as fiction entertainment? Today, no one knows the answer to these questions, but some public interest in the story of the ghost of Willow Springs continues as evidenced by a statement of Miss Annie R. Mitchell, the official historian of Tulare County: "The ghost of Mountain House at Willow Springs still crops up."



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*Local Indians told stories of a tribe of "devils" that the Indians called "Swalalahists" who inhabited the area. According to the legends, these creatures were tall, hairy, and predisposed to killing anyone entering their territory.*

# Gold & Monsters

By Vern Wimmer

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When gold was discovered on the Southern Oregon Coast, about 1851, it drew hundreds of miners from the goldfields of California. The first miners worked the black sands of the ocean beaches. Before long intrepid souls ventured up the coastal streams to try their hands at prospecting. Clashes between these newcomers and native Indians led to bloody battles and killings. Some of the argonauts met their ends by angering forces that even the Indians were afraid of.

In the upper reaches of the Sixes River, in northern Curry County, is a place where no Indian would go. It is one of the most rugged and inhospitable regions in Oregon. Local Indians told stories of a tribe of "devils" that the Indians called "Swalalahists" who inhabited the area. According to the legends, these creatures were tall, hairy, and predisposed to killing anyone entering their territory. These stories, of course, were not sufficient warning to deter white gold prospectors.

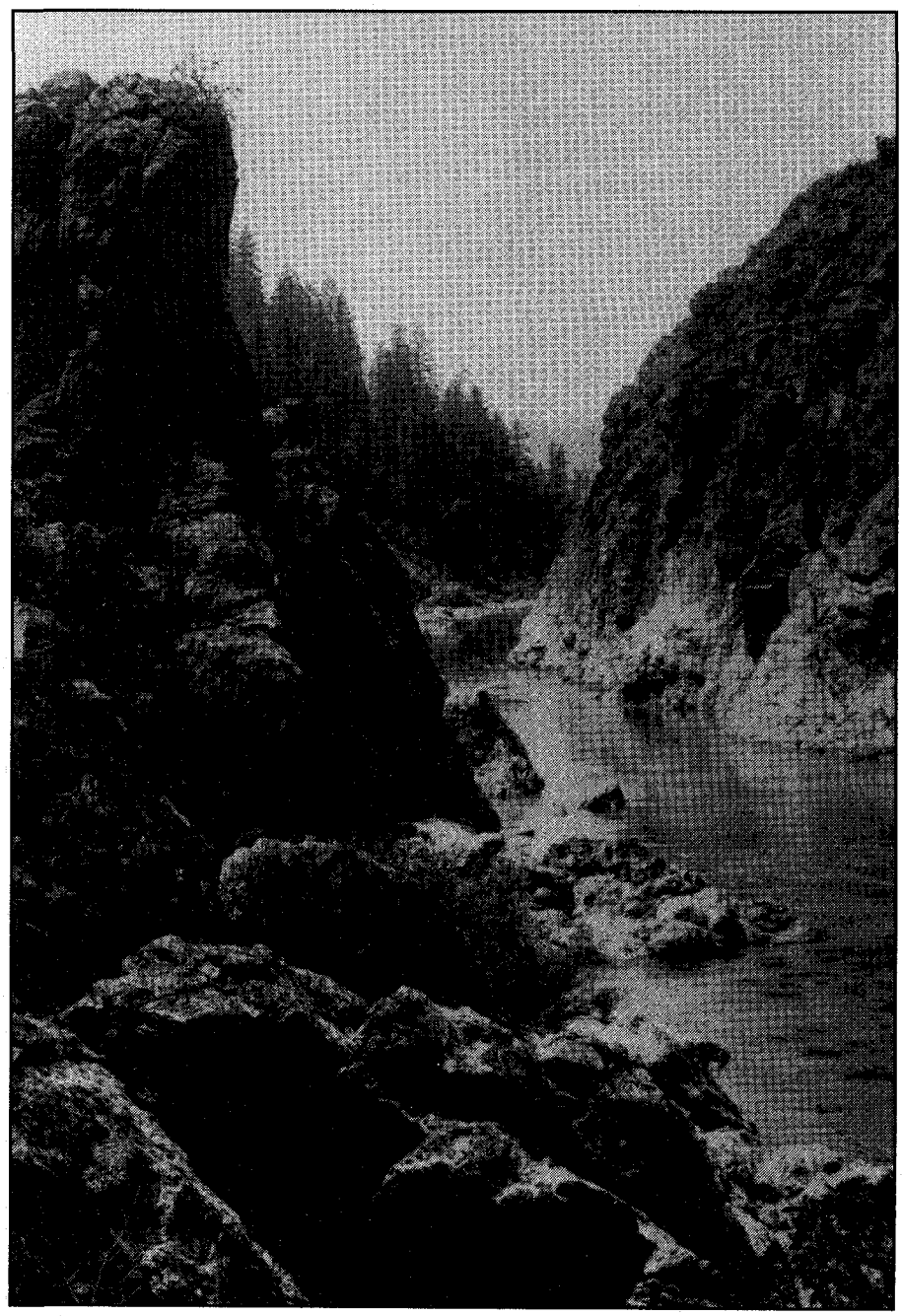
A man known today as "Nugget" Tom went up the Sixes River in 1871 to stake a claim. By all accounts his claim at Star Gulch did well. Being at the headwaters of the river, Tom noticed the nuggets he found had sharp edges and were not worn as they would be if they had traveled very far in the stream.

Tom's common sense told him that the "motherload" from which these nuggets came must be somewhere above him on Star Mountain. He was not a young man at this time, somewhere in his seventies, but the lure of gold can make a man overlook such small details. Tom set out to find the source of the gold in the stream.

For two days Tom searched the mountain, digging and examining rocks. Finally he found what he was looking for. (Later Tom would say that he had the feeling he was being watched.) Eagerly Tom chipped off large pieces of a gold-rich quartz ledge and stowed them in his pack. He then started for home.

Down below, neighboring miners had begun to worry about "Old" Tom. They formed a search party and went looking. They found him still alive but unconscious. An intense search found his equipment and his pack, they had been strewn about a wide area but the pack still contained some of the valuable samples, as did Tom's coat pockets. Several days later Tom regained consciousness and told his tale. The last thing he could remember was being thrown off a ledge by something unseen but with great strength.

It would take six months before the weather, and his injuries, would let Tom return to his mountain of gold. Now well armed, and with the new nickname "Nugget" Tom, he set off. He would spend the next four years trying to find the location of that rich ledge with no luck. It was assumed that his injuries had affected his memory. Enough people had seen the samples the search party found with him to assure he was never doubted or ridiculed. He never found a thing and, at nearly eighty years old, he left the area, never to be heard from again.



Western Publications

The Rogue River is located in Oregon's Curry County—land of the "Swalalahist."



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With the continuing lust for gold, the story does not end there. During the next ten years, four separate men went in to the mountains at the head of Star Gulch to find the gold ledge. Each one of these men, or what was left of them, was buried in a small meadow in the hills and their deaths duly recorded with the county. No causes for the deaths were ever recorded. Local legends say that even more "permanent residents" went into the hills and never returned.

The last documented incident occurred in 1899. With determination and plenty of equipment, two daring men by the names of Robbins and Benson set out to find the lost ledge. They quickly narrowed the search to a small stream coming out of a steep, narrow canyon. They traced the stream to a rock ledge there they found gold-laced quartz. It was not as rich as the samples of "Nugget" Tom, but it was a good strike. They immediately began to crush up the samples and pan them out.

The two had not been at work long when they were attacked. They later described it as almost seven feet tall, covered with yellow hair, having sharp teeth, and dark eyes. The "creature" scattered their equipment, throwing most of it off a cliff. The two men said that firing their weapons at the "thing" had no effect. They fled the area rapidly.

When they reached civilization they still had some of their gold samples with them. They filed a claim on the site dubbing it the "Wild Man Mine." Despite the high quality of the samples, they never returned to the mine. Eventually the claim was sold but the new owner never got up enough courage to go near the place either.

Were the "Swalalahists," the Indians told of, a malevolent cousin to the Sasquatch (better known as "Bigfoot")? No one knows. Two things are certain; there are two separate gold ledges on the head waters of the Sixes River, and no one has ever found them. Perhaps the "Swalalahists" buried them to discourage "trespassers."

***The two had not been at work long when they were attacked. They later described it as almost seven feet tall, covered with yellow hair, having sharp teeth, and dark eyes. The "creature" scattered their equipment, throwing most of it off a cliff. The two men said that firing their weapons at the "thing" had no effect.***

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# Gunfire at Espantosa Lake

## by Chuck Parsons

Espantosa Lake! The name has a certain air of mystery about it. For years, this body of water, with its uneven edges, some seven or eight miles in length, has been, on bright days, a haven for fishermen. Though narrow, it is immense in depth and contains many varieties of fish. The banks are lined with live oak and a creamy mast weighs down the branches. All this provides a peaceful setting for those few with no superstitions.

But for many the name causes an uneasiness. Frequently there is a ghostly fog rising from the waters which obscures the actual level of the lake, where the land's edge ceases and the water begins. The natural lake, located some five miles northeast of Carrizo Springs in north central Dimmit County, Texas, drains into Soldier Slough. Once upon a time it was a natural campsite for travelers on the old San Antonio Road. But gradually stories grew about the ghostly apparitions which appeared in the dense fog; stories that told of men being murdered and their bodies dumped into the deep waters. Stories also told of alligators which made quick work of anyone approaching too close to the edge of the murky waters. Gradually Espantosa Lake, which means "fearful" or "horrid" in Spanish, became a place to be avoided if at all possible. Only the bravest would chance meeting an apparition of a murdered man in the fog!

But such a setting, although fearful for the honest traveler or settler wanting to establish a ranch or farm and raise cattle and crops along with a family, was often the ideal place for the desperado, the man who had a reason to avoid the law.

Chuck Parsons Collection

Texas Ranger Sergeant John B. Armstrong about the time of the gunfight at Espantosa Lake.

In late September 1876, Texas Ranger Sergeant John B. Armstrong, of Captain L.H. McNelly's Special Militia Company, learned a band of desperadoes was rumored to be camped on Espantosa Lake. As with any report, Armstrong considered that checking it out would be the only way to tell. His initial information led him to believe the notorious King Fisher was possibly there, a top gun who was one of the "most wanted" men on the Rangers' lists.

Fisher had been captured earlier that year by Captain McNelly himself; but no sooner had he been turned over to authorities than he was released due to the spinelessness of those very authorities. At least that was what McNelly and the Rangers believed. Ever since then McNelly and his men wanted to get King Fisher in their clutches, or better still their rifle sights, and here was their opportunity. Others who were possibly with Fisher included Alf Day and one or both of the Callison brothers, all implicated in a recent bank robbery at Goliad, Texas. From the lawmen's viewpoint, there was the definite possibility of a huge catch—if the fishing was good!

Armstrong sent part of his detachment to investigate a report of stolen cattle on another ranch but kept with him half a dozen dependable Rangers. Privates Thomas N. Devine, Thomas J. Evans, George P. Durham, George W. Boyd, A. L. Parrott, and Napoleon A. Jennings were in attendance, according to the account left by Jennings himself. They were all



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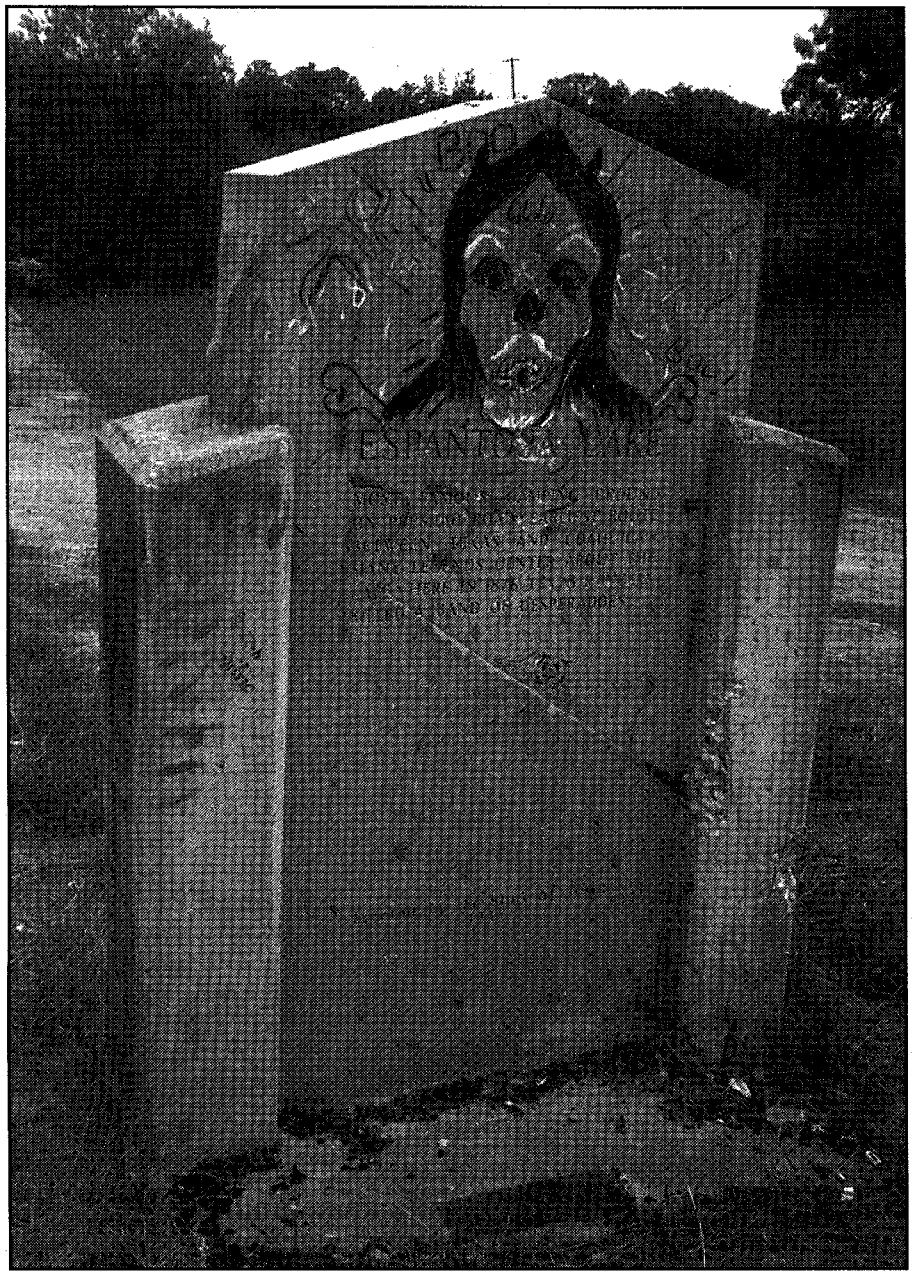


Chuck Parsons Photo

Modern day "graffiti artists" have damaged the historical marker on the shore of Espantosa Lake, erected by the state of Texas in 1936.

young men who were not afraid of badmen, ghosts, or strange noises on dark and rainy nights. With their powerful Sharps rifles and Armstrong to guide them, they were dauntless.

On the way from Carrizo Springs, now county seat of Dimmit County and where Armstrong had been camped, the lawmen captured young Noley Key, a man who had the reputation of being a horse thief and, if not an actual member of the King Fisher gang, one sympathetic to that bandit leader. Key surrendered meekly and Armstrong convinced him that he would guide the Rangers to the outlaws' camp. Just how Armstrong accomplished this was never divulged, but apparently a few mild threats were sufficient to cause Key to decide to cooperate with the Rangers. Neither Jennings nor Armstrong hinted of any "third degree" tactics, but George Durham later recollected that Armstrong, or someone acting on his orders, had put a noose around Key's neck and hoisted him a few feet off the ground until he agreed to lead the way to the outlaw camp. Knowing McNelly's ways of dealing with prisoners, no doubt Durham's explanation of how Noley Key decided to become a Ranger guide is the more accurate!

Armstrong managed to get within sight of the outlaw camp on the edge of Espantosa's waters when he ordered the men to dismount. It was then a matter of sneaking up to the outlaws and take their camp by surprise. He ordered two men to stay with the horses and guard Key. These two Rangers were Thomas N. Devine and Thomas J. Evans.

Armstrong was very specific in his instructions to the two men. If Key attempted to escape he was to be shot, orders simple and short. They were issued in close proximity to prisoner Key so he could not help but know what his fate would be if he did try to escape. With the prisoner-guide secure and the horses in good hands, Armstrong laid out his plan of attack. It was also simple, and within his simple "battle plan" was the promise of excitement.

"Boys, we are going to capture those thieves or kill them....Key tells me that they stood off the sheriff and his posse a few nights ago, and so they'll be looking for officers and be prepared to fight. That's just what we want. If they will only fire at us, we can rush in on them and kill the last one of them. Nothing but that will break up this gang. I only hope they'll show fight. Now, come along and don't make any noise." Obviously Armstrong wanted a fight, and he knew his men preferred a fight over inaction.

It was midnight when Armstrong and the rest of his detachment proceeded on foot toward the camp, illuminated by a large campfire. The flickering fire and the imaginations of the outlaws may have kept them all alert, even though several were in their bedrolls. But the Rangers were detected still some sixty feet from the camp. Later, Sergeant Armstrong reported that the lawmen discovered the gang's "camp on the bank directly in front of us [and] advanced to within twenty yards of them where two of them commenced firing on us with their six shooters[.] [W]e re-



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sponded promptly & a lively little fight ensued...."

"A lively little fight" was certainly an understatement. Before all the smoke cleared there were three men dead in the camp, one man suffering from multiple wounds, and the echo of gunfire from where Devine and Evans were guarding prisoner Key and the horses.

Armstrong had used the lake itself as part of his battle strategy. He had ordered his handful of men to advance in a half-circle so that the lake itself would be at the back of the outlaws, leaving them no route of escape except by running either into the guns of the Rangers or into the water. Because it was a moonlit night Armstrong had advanced as close as he did by staying within the shadows of the trees. Because Armstrong was a McNelly product, known as "Little McNelly," he no doubt was in the center of the Rangers advancing on the gang. When he felt close enough to the camp, he called on the men to surrender. For a reply he was fired upon, which was just what he wanted. The Rangers responded in kind and a general firefight ensued. Jennings recalled that there were two hundred shots exchanged within the space of a few minutes!

When the firing ceased, the Rangers found they had suffered no casualties. The same could not be said for the desperadoes. Although Jennings claimed there were seven men in the outlaw camp, there were only four. Of these four, "One-eyed John" Martin, Jim Roberts, and George Mullen were dead. Jim McAllister, whom Jennings claimed was his victim, was presumed dead. Jennings said he was bending over the man when he saw the outlaw's eyes move.

"Hello! This man isn't dead."

The wounded man looked Jennings straight in the eye and began to beg for his life. "For God's sake, gentlemen, don't kill me. For God's sake don't kill me!"

Jennings assured him they were not murderers and offered to give him some water. The man, wounded in the leg and the jaw and else-

## DOCUMENTING A GUNFIGHT

Of the Rangers involved in the midnight firefight on the shores of Lake Espantosa, several left their version for posterity. Sergeant Armstrong telegraphed a report to Captain McNellly on October 1, within hours of the fight. Because he was in command of the detachment this remains the official report of the incident. T.N. Devine wrote out a seven-page report dated September 4, 1877, not quite a year following the fight. N.A. Jennings may have sent a communication to a San Antonio newspaper, as Durham states, but his name was not recorded as the correspondent. Nevertheless, he wrote his version of the affair in his highly controversial but popular *A Texas Ranger*, first published in 1899, twenty-three years after the fight. Jennings claimed to have kept in touch with his Ranger companions through the years, in fact stating that Armstrong and Devine were two who had "kindly assisted me in gathering together the details of half-forgotten Ranger history during my visit to Texas, a few years ago." George Durham narrated his version of being a Ranger to newspaperman Clyde Wantland. It was first serialized in the 1930s in an obscure western pulp, then published in book form as *Taming the Nueces Strip—The Story of McNelly's Rangers* by the University of Texas Press in 1962. These various accounts agree in the basic facts of the incident but strangely are in significant opposition in others. For example: Jennings and Durham both wrote of *seven* outlaws in the camp, although Armstrong and Devine mention and identify only *four*. If there were more than the four outlaw casualties, it is odd that no one recounted the "three who got away." And Devine specifically mentioned the Sharps rifle, a weapon McNelly preferred his men to use. Jennings states there were 200 shots fired, which seems an astronomical number in the short time span and with little resistance from the four outlaws. Wrote Durham: "We crouched and charged in with our repeater rifles blazing away, wasting ammunition. But we sprayed the camp good." This would tend to reinforce Jennings' claim as to the large number of shots fired, but on the contrary, McNelly didn't want men who missed; thus the expression "blazing away" and admitting to "wasting ammunition" does not ring true from a McNelly man, especially one who unabashedly admired Captain McNelly!

The fact that this one incident—which involved but seven Rangers—was recorded by such a high percentage of its participants (Armstrong, Devine, Jennings, and Durham—57%) makes this gunfight one of the best documented in Texas Ranger history.



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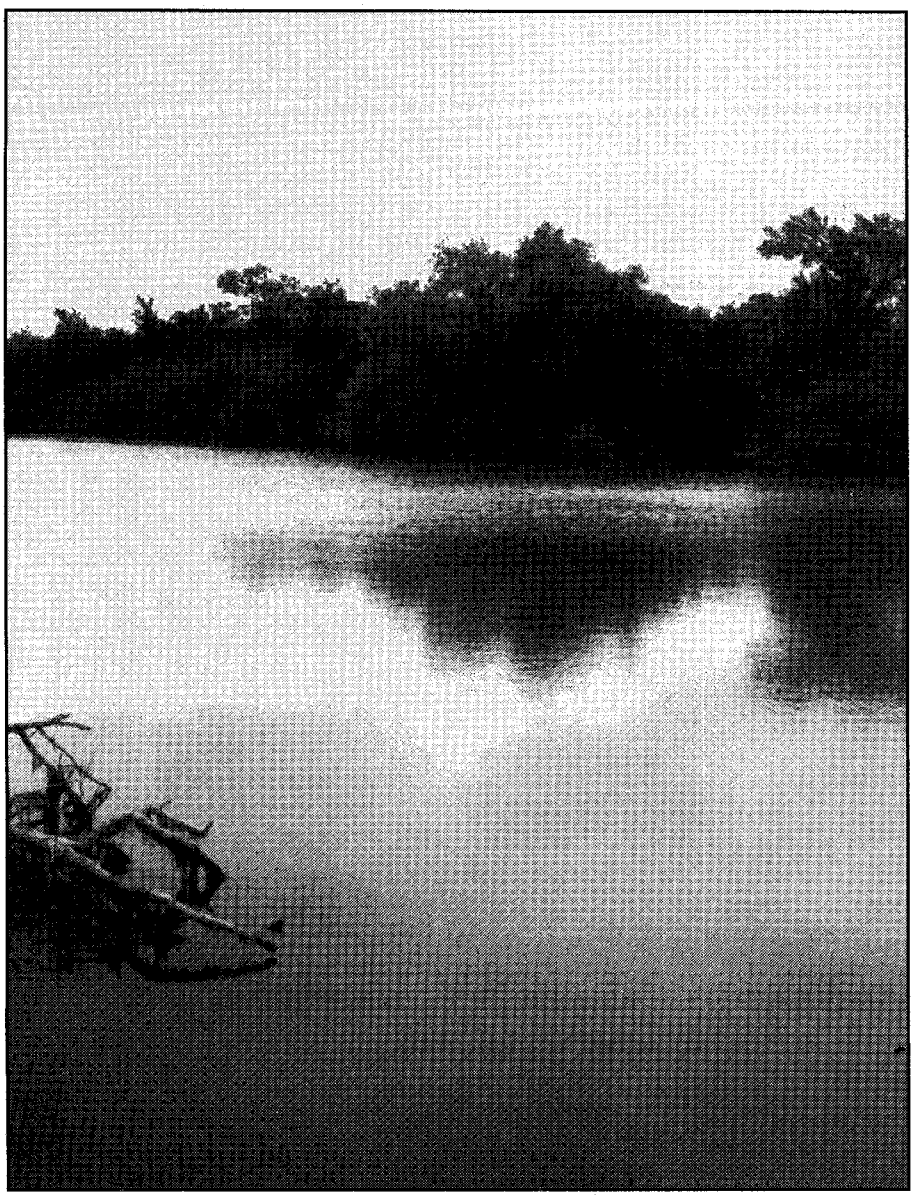

Chuck Parsons Photo

A view of Espantosa Lake, or "Haunted Lake".

where in the body, was made as comfortable as possible until a wagon was secured to take him to a doctor.

With the gunfight over Armstrong and his men returned to their horses. Besides rounding up stolen stock they had three bodies to deal with and a prisoner severely wounded. They also had prisoner Noley Key. As Devine later wrote about Noley Key:

> Heard there were a large number of indictments against him for horse-stealing. Key seemed a little deaf; he talked freely going to the camp. He told me after we arrived where the horses were left, that he had had a difficulty with a man by the name of Rhett, and that he would kill Rhett if he ever came back...as Rhett was a scoundrel and had 'gone back' on them, and had given 'the boys away.'

"It was an unpleasant duty," Devine recalled, in explaining what had happened to Key. When the firing began between Armstrong's men and the outlaws, the sounds of the heavy Sharps rifles startled the horses. Evans and Devine both started to quiet them down, temporarily taking their attention away from the prisoner. Then Key thought he had his chance to escape while both guards were distracted. Devine later wrote:

> I discovered Key in the act of running, and eight or ten paces from us. I called to him to halt, which caused Evans to turn round, when I think he also ordered him to halt. Key hesitated slightly, and then increased his pace, as though he had not been determined at first but now made up his mind to try it. We repeated the call to halt, and he not stopping, on the third, we fired. He fell and died in a few moments. He was trying to reach a thicket or wood distant, probably twenty or thirty yards from where we were. He was ten or fifteen paces from us when we fired.
>
> It was an unpleasant duty, but he knew what were our orders if he attempted escape. We were sworn on enlisting, to 'obey the orders of our superior officers' etc. and if he ran we had orders to shoot, and when he did run, we had no option. Capt. McNelly's standing orders were to shoot any prisoner attempting escape.

Armstrong's report indicated there were only the four outlaws in the camp, not seven as Jennings later claimed. Three had been killed and one badly wounded. Another was killed in attempting to escape, although the men they wanted most—King Fisher, the Callisons, and Day—had eluded them. The same night Armstrong had sent a squad of three men to another supposed outlaw camp to arrest a "bad man," who also resisted arrest and was killed. Thus, in a single night's work, five outlaws had been killed for resisting the call to surrender; one other was severely wounded. That four of the dead had given up the ghost on the shores of Espantosa Lake certainly only added to the fearful tales told about it. For the would-be bad man at least, Lake Espantosa, or Horrid Lake, Ghastly Lake, or Haunted Lake, by whatever name it was called, certainly rang true.



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# Colorado's Long-Haired

## By Doris Cerveri

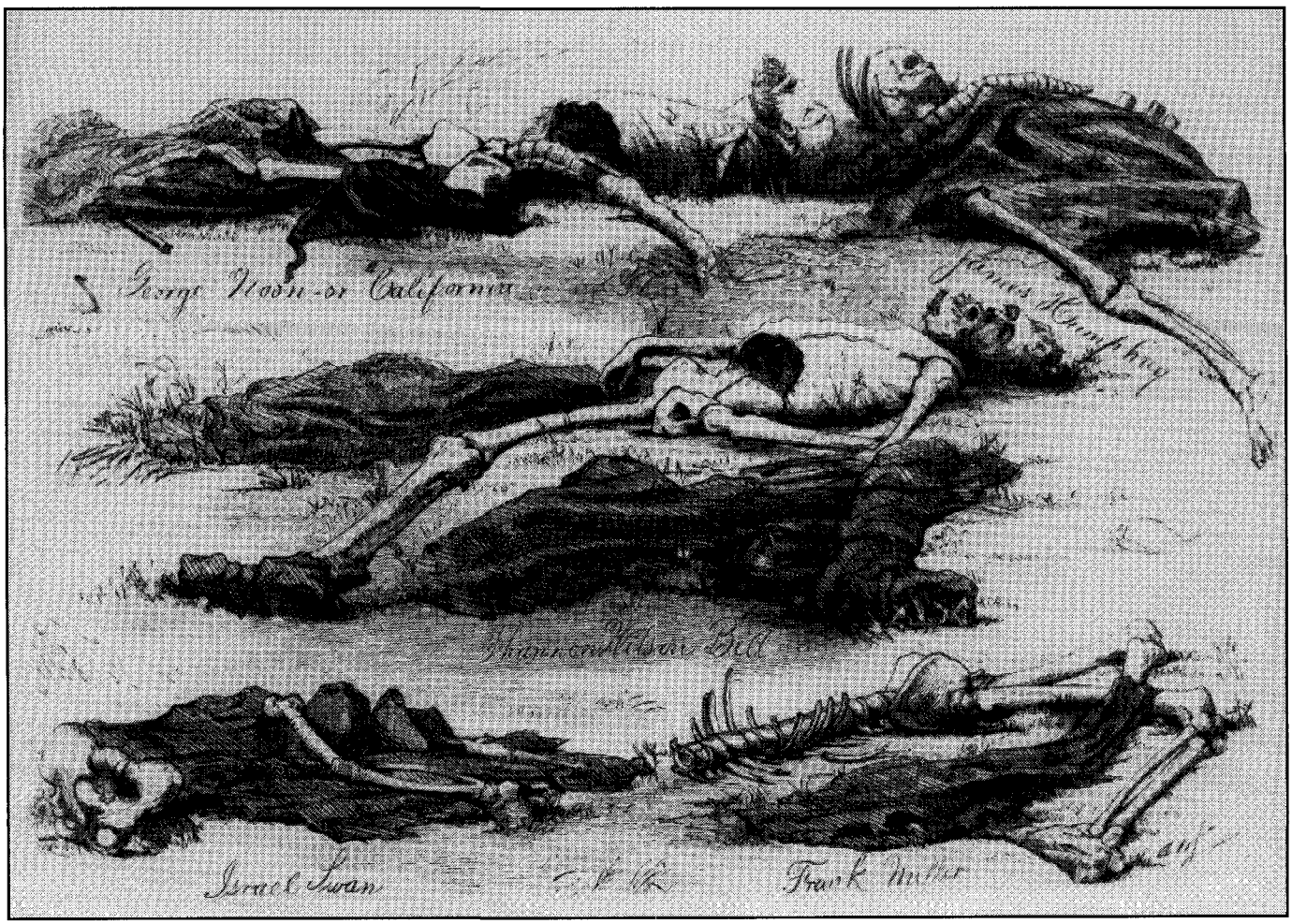
The sweet stench of fresh blood permeated the chill winter air. So intent and completely absorbed was a long-haired, unkempt man upon satisfying his hunger that he seemed totally oblivious to the odor. He hunched over a small campfire chewing and sucking noisily on a large hunk of roasted meat. Minutes passed before he stood, and after wiping greasy hands on dirty trousers, he gathered up other bits and pieces of meat and stuffed them in a crumpled bag.

Without a backward glance he assembled his meager gear and left camp. On April 17, 1873, he showed up at the Los Pinos Indian Agency east of Lake City in Hinsdale County, Colorado.

Like other states, Colorado in the mid-1860s was experiencing a series of rich ore strikes. Consequently, hordes of individuals sold everything they owned and set out for Colorado to be among the first to hit it rich. Jobs were scarce and it was worth a try to find a bonanza.

The Packer group was originally a party of twenty-one prospectors who left their homes in Salt Lake City, to explore the southwest portion of Colorado where rich gold and silver discoveries had been reported. In this group a man named Alferd Packer was hired as a "camp helper."

The prospectors stopped at Gingham Canyon, eighteen miles east of Salt Lake City. None of them realized they were in the area of what would one day be one of the largest and richest strikes in the world, two miles wide and a mile deep.




State Historical Society of Colorado

Alferd Packer's traveling companions, from *Harpers' Weekly*, October 1874.



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# Cannibal

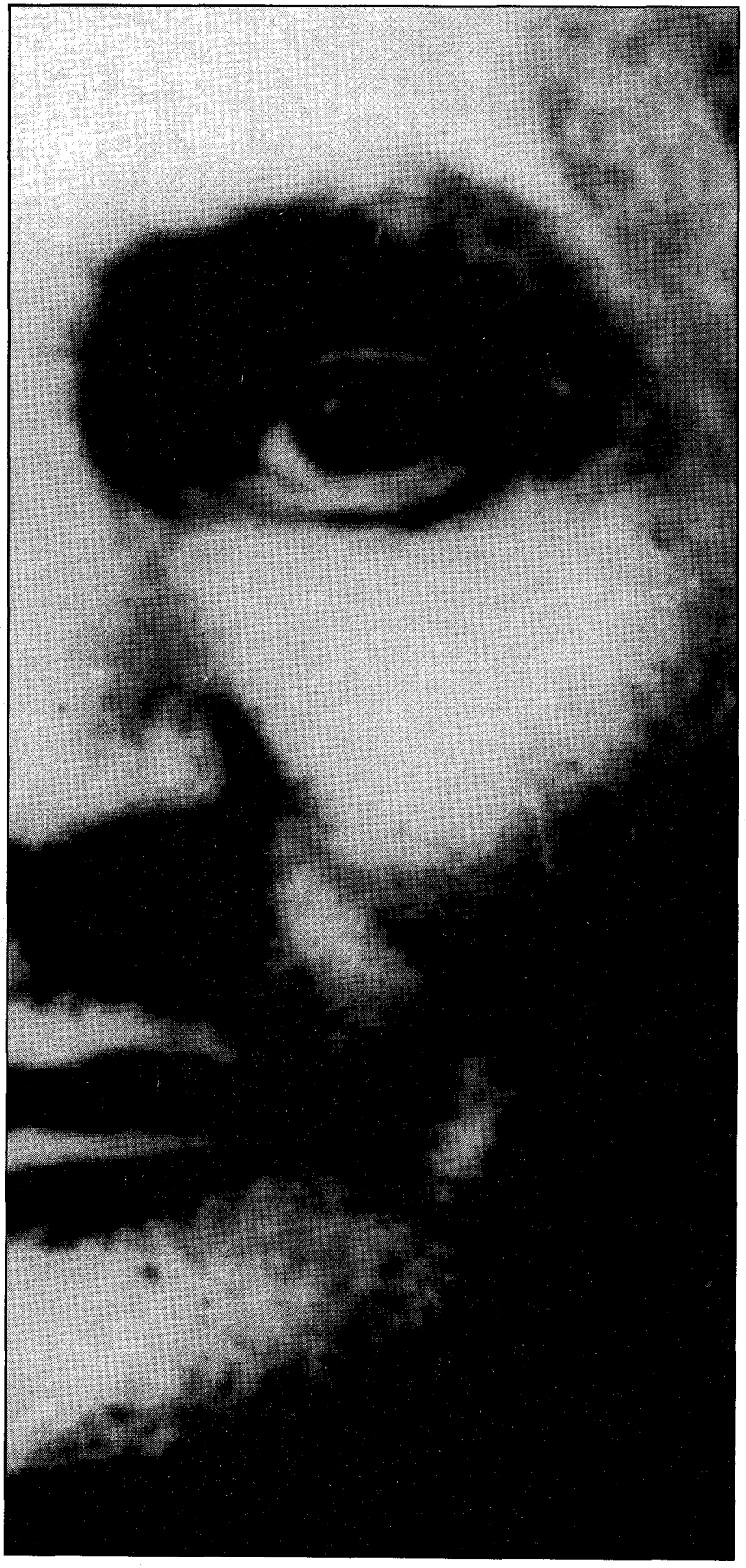
Just a few miles from the present city of Montrose, Colorado, the party broke up. Six men, George Noon, James Humphrey, Shannon Bell, Israel Swan, Frank Miller, and Packer, left the main party. All of the men, except Packer, had money. In fact, one man bragged about having $100. Envious glances were directed his way as that much money was a healthy sum in 1873; a fellow sporting that much cash was considered in the same class as a millionaire.

The six men rested here before continuing their journey. Five of them were never seen alive again. What actually happened during their search for riches, or exactly what route they travelled, is a matter of considerable conjecture. As a matter of record, historians have only the several versions of what transpired as told by Alferd Packer, the only surviving member of the group.

When Packer showed up alone at the Los Pinos Indian Agency looking fairly well fed and none the worse for his ordeal, several people became suspicious. Packer was asked so many questions that he finally broke down and confessed to eating his companions during a two-month period when he had no food and was completely lost between Lake Cristobal, located southeast of Montrose, and the agency.

In relating the men's experiences, Packer indicated that after leaving the camp of an Indian, Chief Ouray, on February 9, the group had only enough food for one man for seven days.

"After traveling for two to three days," Packer said, "we ran into mountains and a severe snowstorm. We came to a mountain, crossed a gulch; came to another mountain





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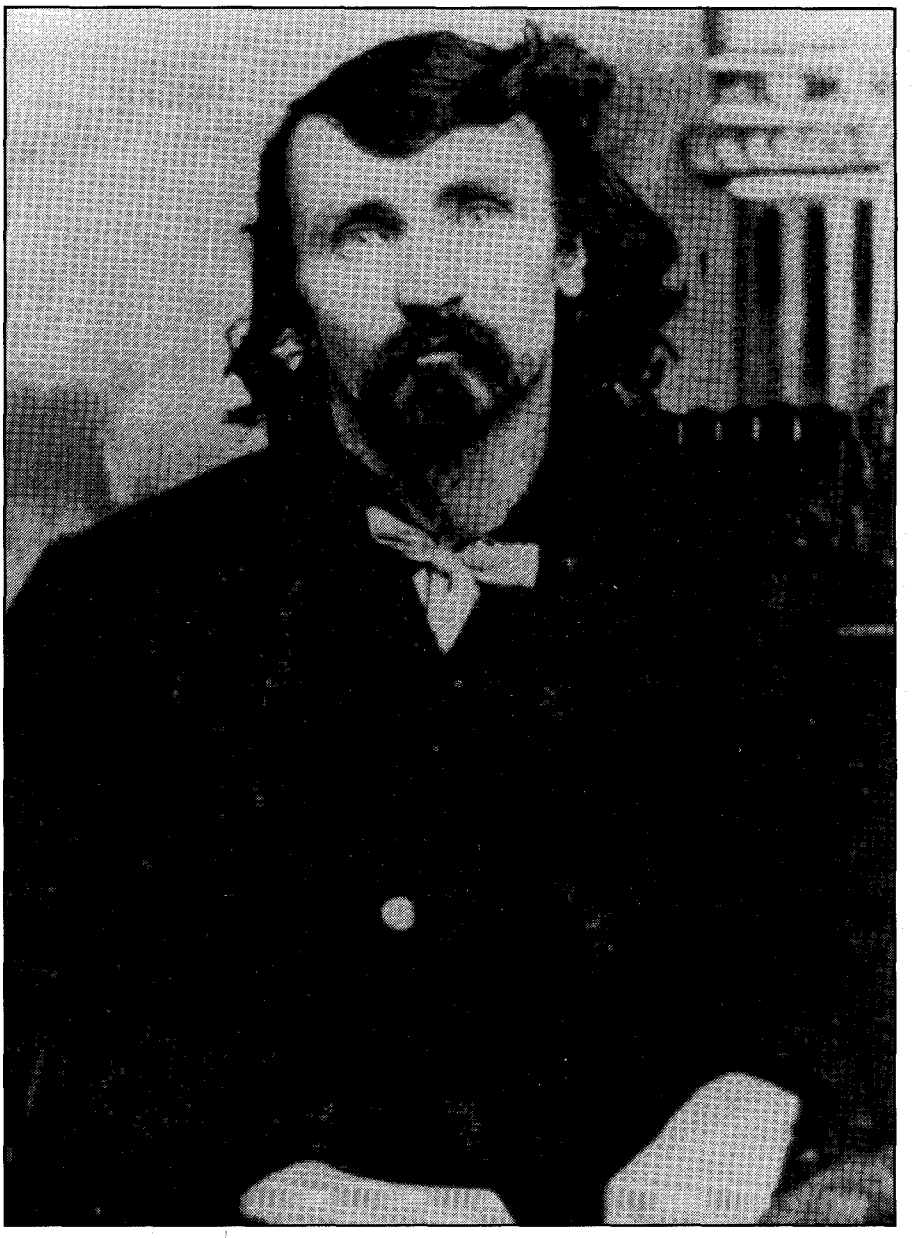
and found snow so deep we had to follow the mountain on top."

From Packer's description of the countryside, it seems the group was probably in the vicinity of present Lake City, Colorado, during the worst month of winter storms. Packer indicated that his companions had died from exposure and starvation. Elaborating slightly, he said, "the fourth day we had only about one pint of flour left. We followed the mountain until we came to the same range and about ten days lived on rosebuds and pine gum."

According to Packer, they then went over the main range and camped twice on a stream which runs into a big lake. This was later established as San Cristobal Lake on the east side of the Continental Divide, south of Argentine Falls and southwest of Slumgullion Pass. The lake is near the headwaters of White Bark Creek that flanks "Cannibal Plateau" on the east, and Hensen Creek on the west after passing though Lake City.

Packer continued his story by saying that everyone by this time was ravenously hungry and the men were alternately crying, praying, and cursing. They tried to catch fish by breaking holes in the ice. This endeavor was a serious failure because the men fell through in some places where the ice was thin. The frigid water added to their discomfort and misery. They even attempted to catch snails, but failed at that also.

Packer indicated the man named Swan asked him to climb up to the top of a small summit and scout for some landmark, or anyone else in the vicinity who could help them. Packer said he went and did not return to camp all day. When he did, he saw one of his companions, a red-headed man, sitting by the campfire roasting a piece of meat which looked like a human leg. As Packer came closer he saw Miller's body lying near the stream. His skull was crushed and one leg was missing. Packer said he was horror-stricken when he saw the bodies of the three other men lying near the fire. Each had large head wounds.



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Alferd Packer.

In both versions of Packer's story he said that as soon as he came close to the fire, the red-headed man lunged for him, hatchet in hand, and Packer shot him in the belly in self defense. Packer then picked up the hatchet and hit his attacker on top of the head.

After this, Packer said he was dazed and he just sat dozing by the campfire all night. The following morning he started over the mountain, following his tracks of the previous day, but the snow was too deep so he returned to camp and constructed a makeshift shelter in the pines. He hastily covered the men, but did eat the meat which the red-headed man had thrown down. Packer claimed he tried to leave camp every day, but severe weather prevented him from doing so. He estimated he stayed in camp about sixty days or so, and during that time was forced to cook and eat his traveling companions to survive. When the weather became warm enough he made his way to the top of the hill despite the fact that his feet were wet and his toes frozen.

Before leaving, he took his companions' money, which amounted to $70. He also took a gun and blanket. Before reaching the Indian agency he ate the remaining piece



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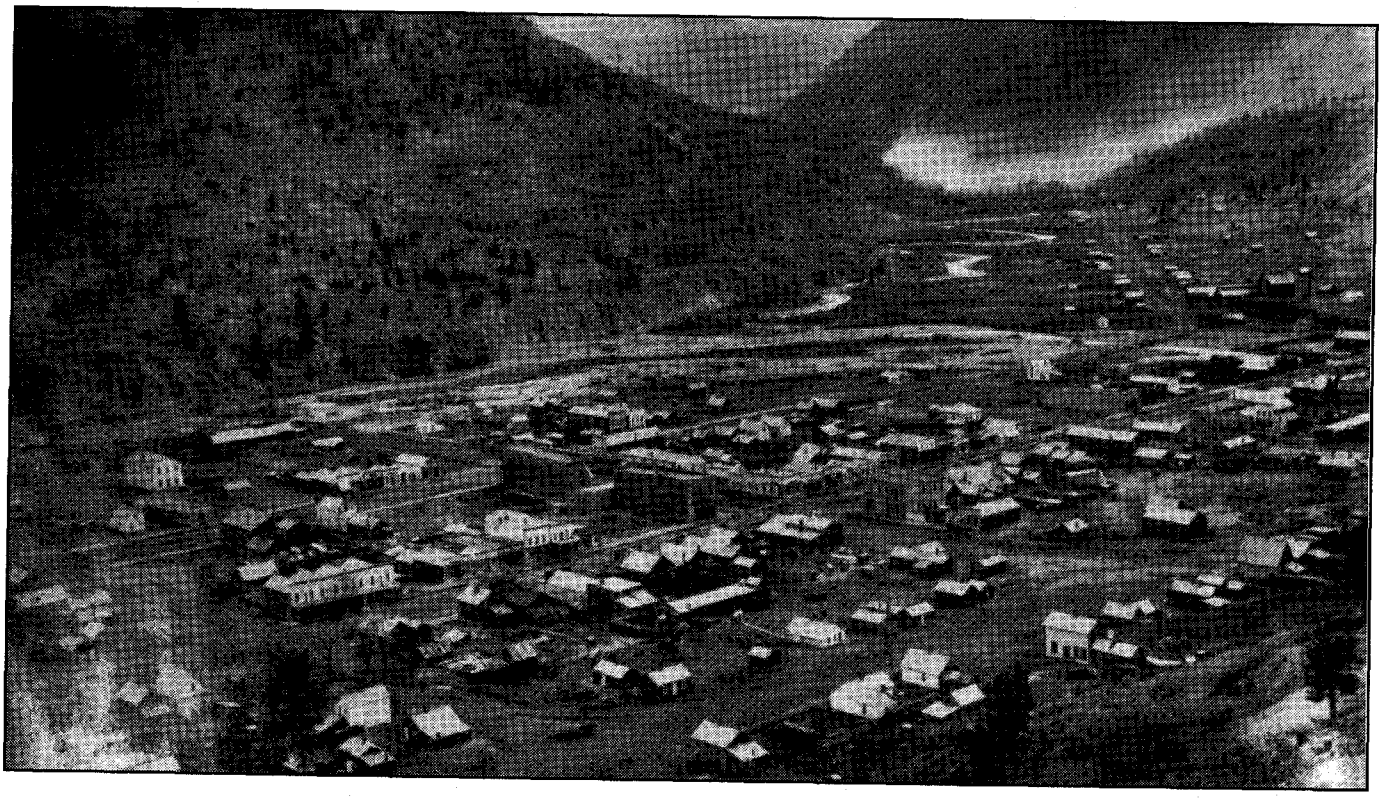

Lake City, Colorado, circa 1882.

State Historical Society of Colorado

of meat, which he had cooked before leaving and had packed in a bag.

After leading a search party to find what was left of the bodies, Packer was arrested and jailed. Before he could be brought to trial he managed to escape. Later it was discovered that an accomplice had passed him a key made from a penknife blade.

Information revealed that he escaped to the Arkansas River Valley, where he worked for John Gill. From there he wandered to Arizona. Nine years passed before the law caught up with Packer. This time he was given a speedy trial and was sentenced to hang. Sentence was pronounced by Judge M.B. Gerry, after which Packer delivered an impressive, heart-rendering speech before the jury.

Packer's attorneys continued to fight and succeeded three times in bringing his case before the Colorado Supreme Court.

People incensed over such a dastardly crime believed the county would save considerable expense in feeding Packer if he were lynched. In fact, a determined vigilante committee waited outside the courthouse with a hangman's noose after the sentencing. Fearing this might happen, authorities transferred Packer to Gunnison, Colorado, where he remained for three years.

The state supreme court reversed its decision on October 30, 1885, due to the technicality of his being charged under territorial law and tried under state law. Packer was retried on August 2-5, 1886, and found guilty of manslaughter. His sentence was eight years for each victim, for a total of forty years. After sentencing Packer, the presiding judge remarked: "Packer, you depraved Republican son of a such-and-such, there were only five Democrats in Hinsdale County, and you ate them all."

Numerous, well-meaning individuals believing him innocent worked hard on Packer's behalf. They secured hundreds of signatures on a petition. People who had never met him believed his story of self defense.

Perhaps the most dedicated was Polly Pry, who worked for the *Denver Post*. During this time, the *Post* was sponsoring the Sells Floto Circus that wintered in Denver. It was rumored that if Packer was paroled, they would put him in an exhibit with Buffalo Bill. The *Post* argued that Packer's case should have been tried in a federal court because the murder occurred on an Indian reservation.

Polly Pry campaigned against everyone who had anything to do with convicting Packer. She particularly harassed Governor Benjamin H. Eaton, claiming that Packer was a pathetic, tragic victim of hatred and persecution, and that the governor had neither heart nor soul. The governor finally got Packer to sign a parole agreement to proceed from Canon City, where he had been in prison, to stay for six years and nine months in Denver.

While in prison, Packer earned about $1500 making hair rope and bridles. With some of this money he paid for an attorney. When editors of the *Denver Post* found out, they demanded half the fee, claiming they deserved it for working to free Packer. An argument over the money broke out in the editors' office and after trading blows, one editor shot another in the shoulder



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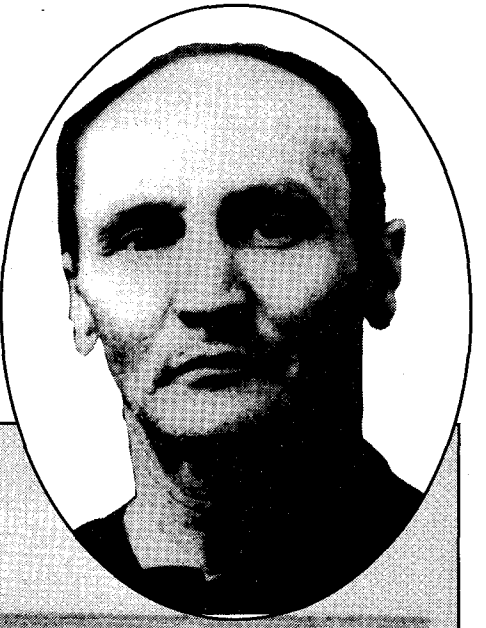
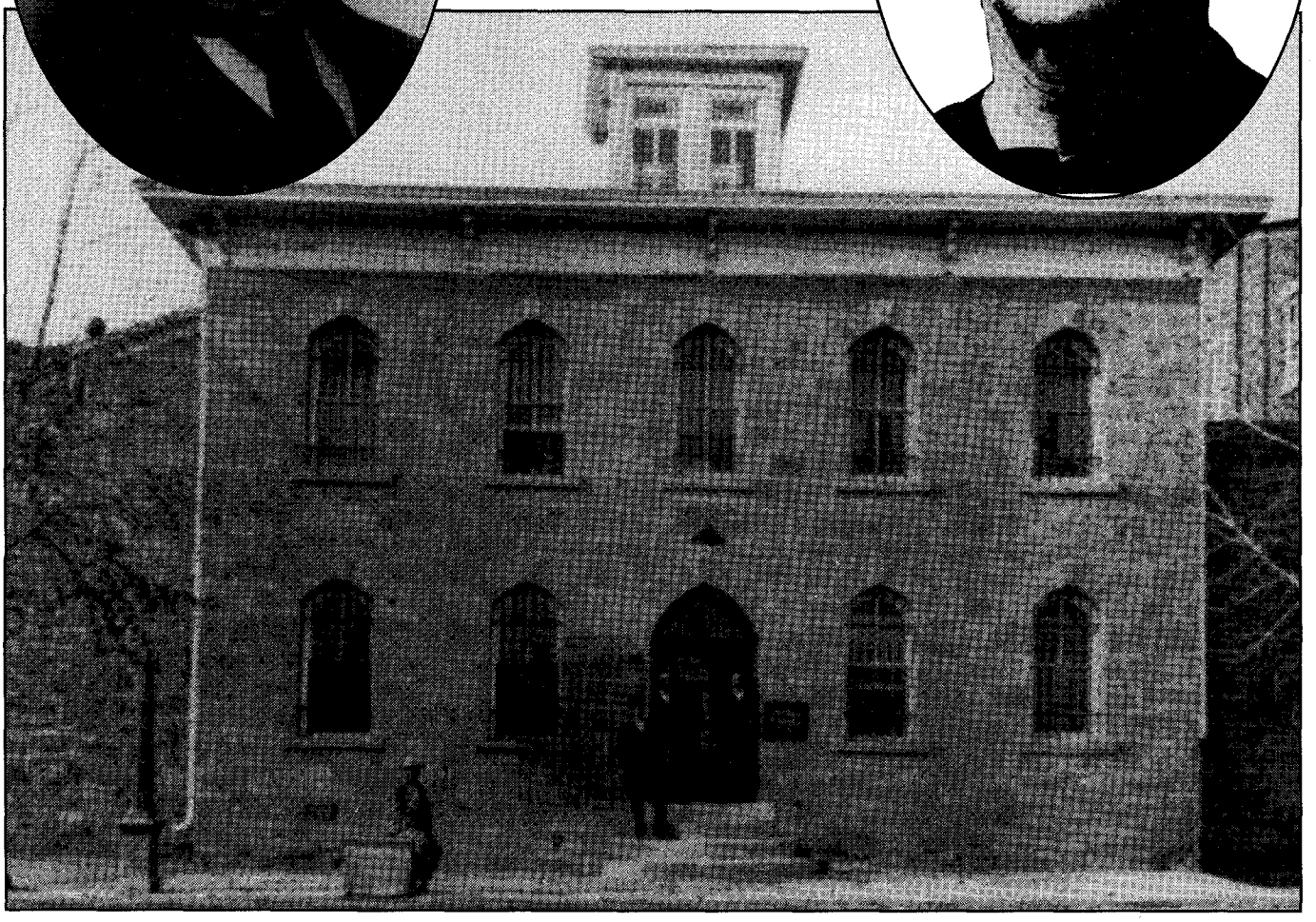
All Photos from State Historical Society of Colorado

(Right) Alferd Packer, as he appeared in prison.

(Left) Judge M.B. Gerry, Seventh Judicial District of Colorado.

(Below) The Colorado State Penitentiary at Canon City, Colorado.





and chest. Assault charges were filed, but the newspaperman was acquitted.

No doubt the judge felt as did many people. The *Denver Post* had carried on a disgusting campaign to free the cannibal.

During the entire affair, newspapers and magazines, especially those in Colorado, luridly covered the Packer case. Cyrus Wells Shores, an outstanding western lawman who came to know Packer well, had this to say:

> For the three years I was associated with Packer, I learned a lot about him—none of it good. I failed to find any good qualities in the man. He is slow-witted, cowardly, vicious and a natural bully. From conversations with him, I learned he had committed other serious crimes. In fact, after his escape from jail when he was first arrested, he admitted to me that he murdered two young men east of Colorado Springs and stole a team and wagon. Later on, near Tombstone, he killed a prospector and took his horse and pack mules. He wrote some of the most depraved letters I have ever read.

There seems to be no doubt that Packer committed a heinous crime. He killed his five exhausted, starving companions in their sleep, and feasted on their remains, their money jingling in his pockets.

Alferd Packer was released from his sentence January 10, 1901. He died six years later, and was buried in Littleton, Colorado.



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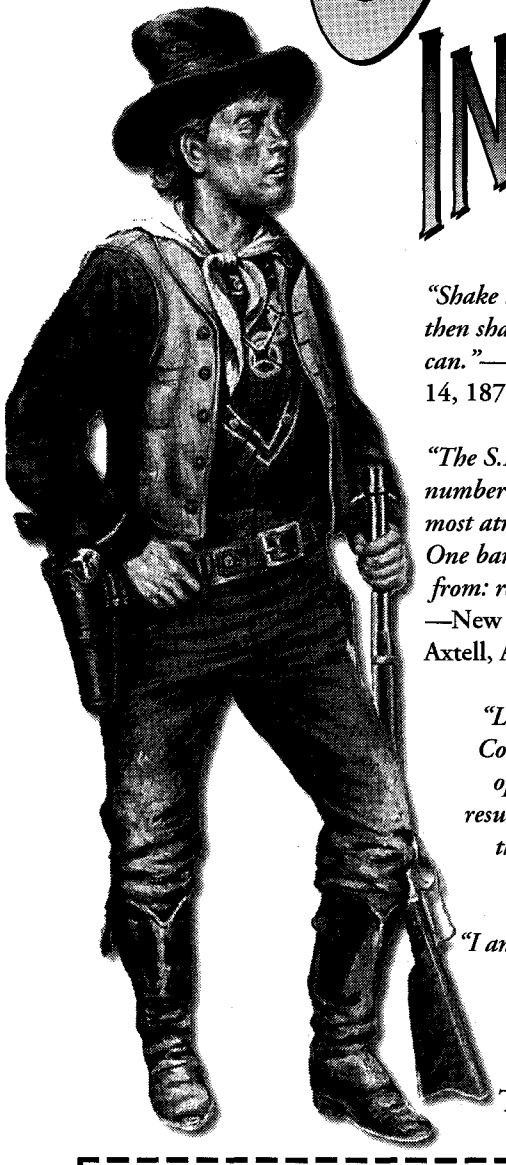
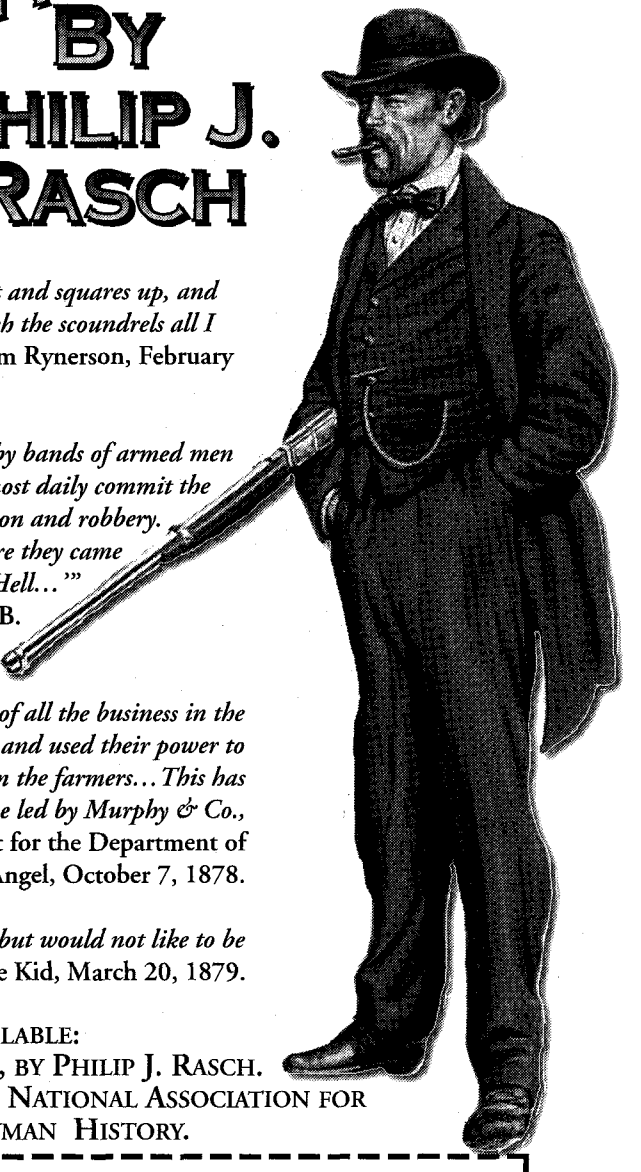
## BY PHILIP J. RASCH





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—New Mexico Territorial Governor Samuel B. Axtell, August 20, 1878.

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# GHOSTS
## Along the Little Bighorn
### By Sandy Barnard

In late December 1991, a light snow had fallen across the valley of the Little Bighorn, as rancher Jason Pitsch trekked across the property his family has owned for generations since early in this century. He had been out testing his metal detector that he uses when looking for artifacts from the great struggle of 1876 between the Seventh United States Cavalry and a coalition of Plains Indian tribes that had taken place across his Montana land.

About mid-afternoon that day in 1876, three companies of the Seventh Cavalry had charged down the valley toward a huge Indian

***By the time he turned around, the horse had disappeared. "There were no prints in the damn snow," he says. "It freaked me out big time."***

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encampment of perhaps 6,000 to 8,000 men, women, and children of the Sioux and Cheyenne. As their attack faltered, their commanding officer, Major Marcus A. Reno, quickly sensed his predicament. His battalion of about 175 soldiers, civilians, and Indian scouts was badly outnumbered; worse, as he looked behind him, his regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, and his five companies were nowhere to be seen in support.

Reno threw out a skirmish line across the valley floor, but soon the Indians threatened to overwhelm his Company M on the west. He pulled his small force back into a nearby area of heavy brush and timber. Enraged warriors edged ever closer. Arikara scout Bloody Knife took a bullet to the head, splattering blood over the major, who may have panicked. He ordered what he later termed a charge against the enemy from the relative safety of the timber. The warriors recalled the ensuing fight as more of a buffalo hunt. By the time Reno's men clambered up the bluffs on the east bank of the Little Bighorn River, a third of his command lay dead, wounded, or missing. Two days later, he would learn Custer himself had suffered a worse fate. All 210 men with him had been killed on that stifling hot afternoon of June 25, 1876.

Author's Collection

A .44 caliber bullet found by Jason Pitsch in the skull of a horse, whose remains he discovered on his property along Reno's retreat route.

The battle's legend and controversy have long intrigued the twenty-seven-year-old Pitsch, who has lived all his life on the very ground where the Indians routed Reno. Inspired by archeologists who had inventoried artifacts on government-held portions of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in the 1980s, Pitsch himself has surveyed his own property with much success.

As he approached a knoll that December evening, he spotted a horse that he thought belonged to a Crow Indian neighbor. "It was limping and had blood on it," Pitsch recalls. "I thought it had a wire cut and I didn't think much of it. I kinda walked a little closer."

He set his metal detector down on the ground. By the time he turned around, the horse had disappeared. "There were no prints in the damn snow," he says. "It freaked me out big time."

Yet the moment was real. He recalled the horse, a brown and white Indian pony similar to what his neighbor owned, had been wounded in the shoulder. "I even touched the damn thing. It still gives me chills."

The next day he returned to the area to metal detect. "What was funny is that day is when I found a Colt single action with a live round in it, right down below near the area. Jan 1, 1992. Serial number 5100."

Ghost stories involving battlefields are common. Today's Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (formerly Custer Battlefield National Monument) in southeastern Montana is no exception. Yet, surprisingly, the ghost of Custer himself must be at rest; at least the most common tales don't speak of his continuing presence on the field where he lost his life. In fact, the only spooky tale associated with Custer himself actually took place 400 miles to the east at old Fort Abraham Lincoln on the early foggy morning of May 17, 1876. As the regiment rode up the slope of the nearby bluffs, Custer's wife Elizabeth was struck by a premonition of impending doom. Years later, she wrote in her book, *Boots and Saddles*, "As the sun broke through the mist a mirage appeared, which took up about half the line of cavalry, and thenceforth for a little distance it marched, equally plain to the sight



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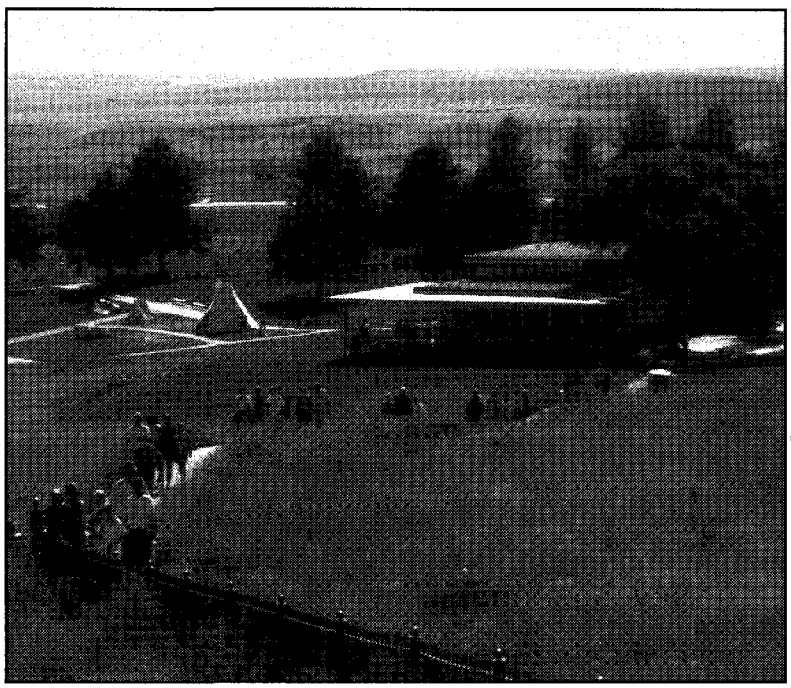
Author's Collection

(Left to right) Jason Pitsch, Dr. Doug Scott, National Park Service archeologist, and anthropologist P. Willey at the marker for the Seventh Cavalry trooper buried on Pitsch's ranch.

on the earth and in the sky. The future of the heroic band, whose days were even then numbered, seemed to be re-vealed, and already there seemed a premonition in the supernatural translation as their forms were reflected from the opaque mist of the early dawn."

She wrote, too, of how on the afternoon of June 25, "our little group of saddened women, borne down with one common weight of anxiety, sought solace in gathering together in our house...At that very hour the fears that our tortured minds had portrayed in imagination were realities, and the souls of those we thought upon were ascending to meet their Maker."

Libbie wasn't the only person with a premonition of impending doom along the Little Bighorn River. About ten days before Custer's soldiers clashed with his people, Sioux medicine man Sitting Bull had endured the elaborate Sun Dance ritual. In his vision, he saw soldiers falling upside down into the Indian camp, a clear sign to him the white men they would fight would be defeated.



Author's Collection

Some think the Little Bighorn National Monument Visitors Center may still be visited by spirits of the battle's dead.

Still, stories about ghosts on the battlefield are plentiful, says researcher Bob Reece, who collects such tales. Many involve the National Park Service Visitors Center, built in 1952 on the low area between Cemetery Ridge and Last Stand Hill. Ever since its construction, park employees have reported goings-on in the building. Soon after it opened, battlefield historian James F. Bowers reported hearing footsteps on the main floor of the locked building as he



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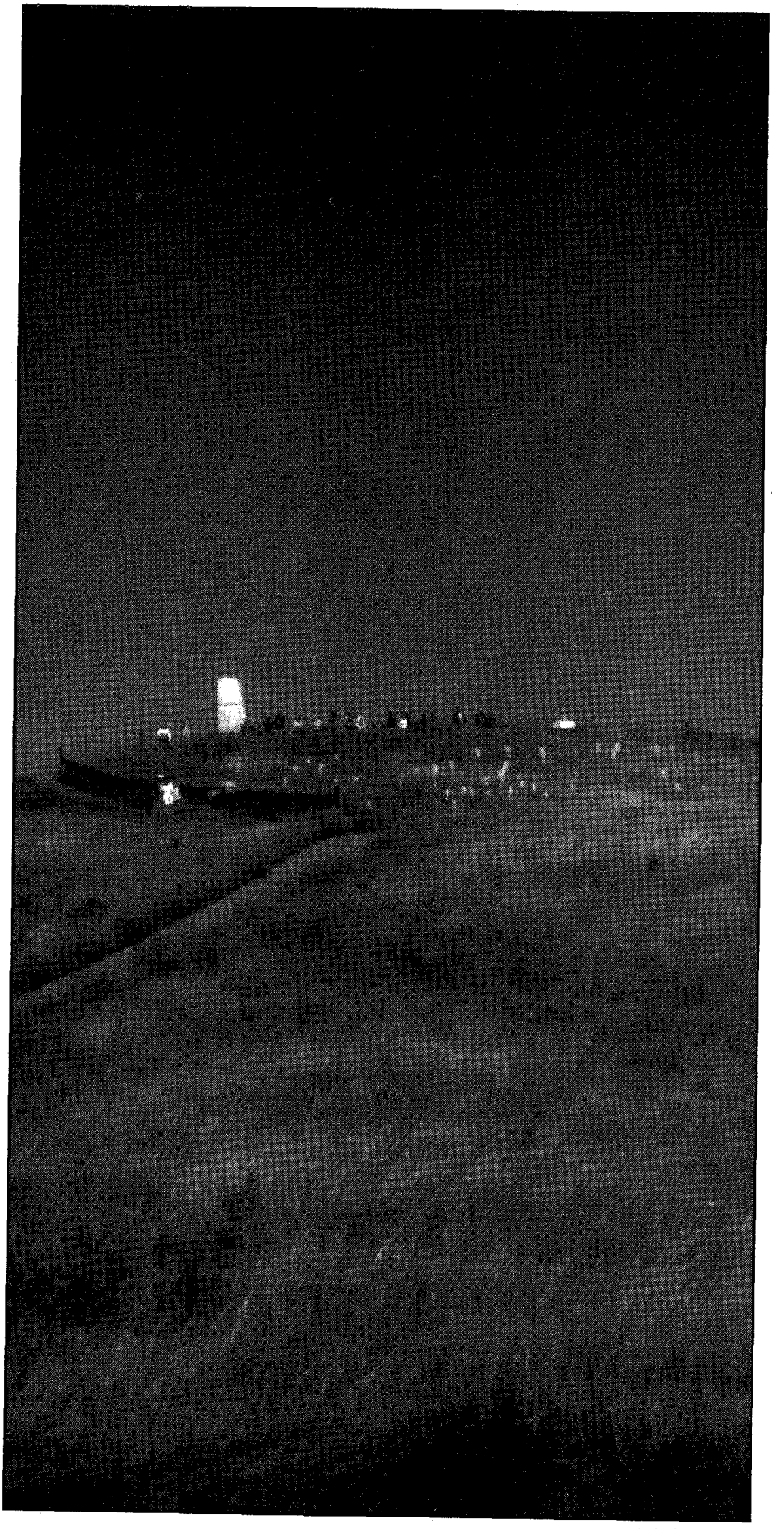
worked in the basement. In just the last fifteen years, at least five National Park Service rangers or superintendents have reported shutting off the lights before locking the doors at the end of the day, only to find them back on later.

Countless employees of either the Park Service or the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association, which formerly ran the bookstore at the battlefield, have reported seeing ghostly shapes in basement rooms of the visitors center. In 1988, CBHMA employee Charles Mulhair approached the book storage room in the basement. "I turned on the light and, as I did that, I saw a figure with his or her back to me, about 15 to 20 feet from the door," he recalled. "The person took a step to the left and disappeared down the third aisle." At first, Mulhair thought the figure might have been his wife Karol, who worked in the bookstore on the main floor, but he found no one else in the room.

Another employee encountered the building's spirit in July 1991. As he worked early one morning, maintenance man Guy Leonard was startled by an apparition. "I was vacuuming, going from one office to the next, when out of the corner of my eye I saw a person standing about 15 feet from me. He was wearing a white, beige, or light brown shirt and he had a black or brown cartridge belt slung diagonally across his chest. I couldn't make out any facial features and he looked a little hazy. I wondered who could be in the building so early in the morning and as I continued to look at him, he just faded away."

On the edge of the National Cemetery sits the historic Stone House, built in the 1890s as the quarters for the battlefield's first caretaker. For many years, it has been used as housing for permanent or seasonal personnel at the park. Many report strange happenings in that building, too: lights flickering, footsteps on floors, objects moved.

Former seasonal ranger Michael Moore lived in the building several times, and on almost each occasion



Author's Collection

Last Stand Hill, where the remains of Custer and forty-five of his men were found after their defeat in June 1876.



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he experienced strange, if not supernatural, occurrences. One night, someone or something pounded away on the other side of a padlocked door to a back room, as if trying to get out, but no human was behind the door. On another night, Moore heard the sound of something heavy, perhaps a file cabinet, being dragged across the upstairs floor, but no one else lived in the building at the time.

The upstairs rooms especially seem vulnerable to supernatural hauntings. A husband and wife team who worked at the battlefield from the 1950s until recently, reportedly saw door knobs turning, heard heavy objects being pushed along the floor, and even heard people screaming and children talking inside the building. In 1982, Ranger Dan Martinez woke up in his bedroom on the upper floor to find an American Indian figure staring down at him. After about a minute, the Indian vanished by walking out of the room.

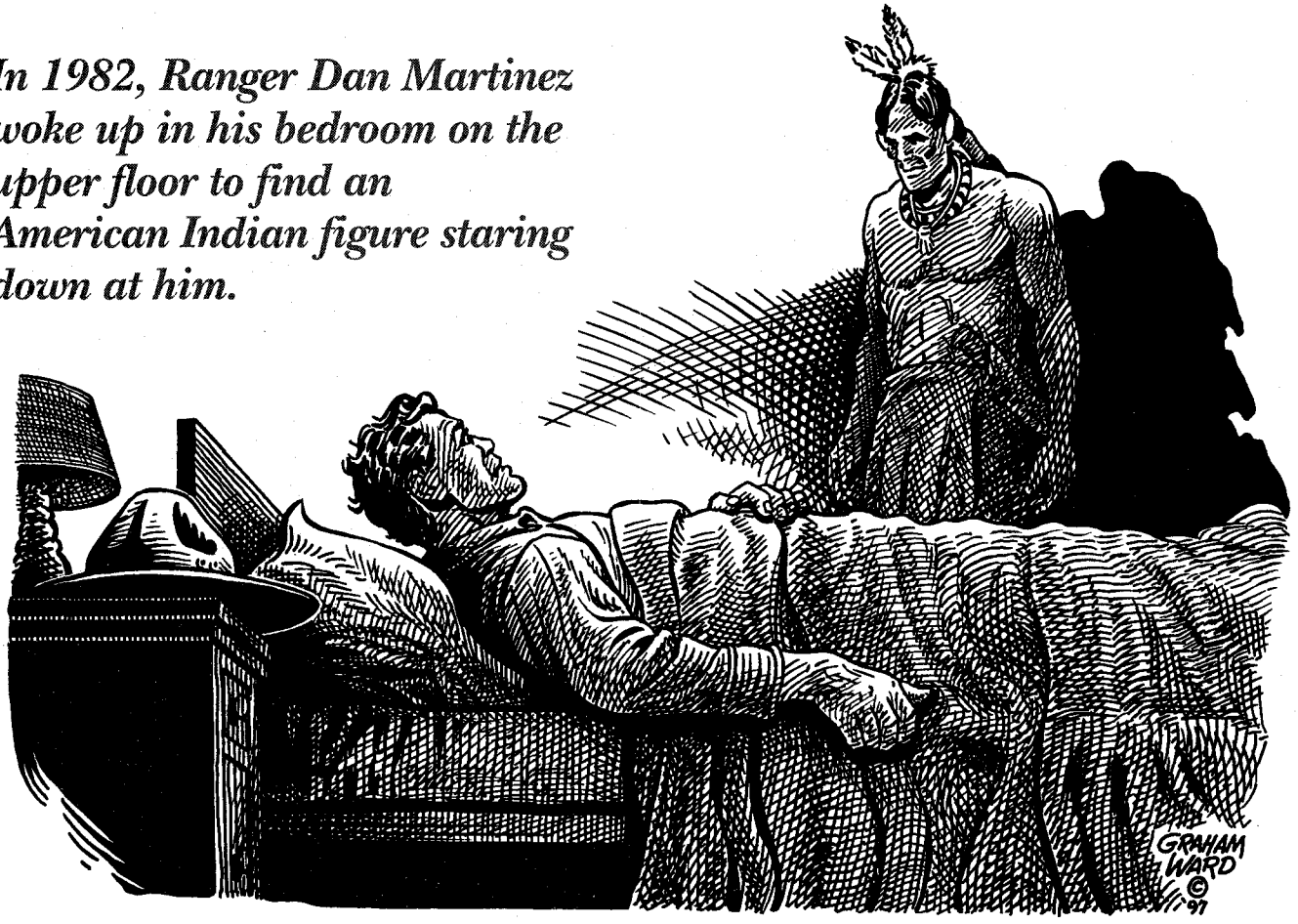
Edward S. Luce, an ex-cavalryman who served devotedly at Little Bighorn in the 1940s and 1950s, may be the most renown former superintendent at the battlefield. He died in the 1960s, but, not surprisingly, he still appears occasionally. He reportedly has been seen walking in the visitors center and peering from the small round window at the top of the Stone House.

Nearby the Stone House are a long building with four apartments and three houses used by park employees. Frequently, their residents encounter spirits. A well-known researcher-author now prefers to deny a story that he told during the archeological projects of the 1980s. Living in one of the houses, he woke up one night to see a figure in a cavalry uniform moving about in the darkened bedroom. The writer initially thought it was his roommate, but he realized the other man was snoring in the next bed. As he sat up in his own bed to take a better look at the ghostly cavalryman, the spirit just disappeared.

Generally, the Little Bighorn's spirits aren't menacing, but student intern Christine Hope may have encountered one of the more troubled supernatural visitors in 1983. While living in one of the apartments, she suddenly awoke one night to find the figure of a man sitting in one of her living room chairs. The man's face was bathed in the moonlight from a nearby window. Hope could make out the man's light-colored beard and long-flowing handlebar mustache. Yet what startled her was the look of terror that crossed the apparition's face. As she told author Earl Murray, "It was his eyes that got to me the most. They were filled with incredible fright. The moon shone on them and they were filled with terror." Soon the ghost just disappeared from her chair.

The next afternoon another battlefield employee and she toured the site of Reno's crossing of the Little Bighorn River during his retreat. They paused at a marble marker recalling Second Lieutenant Benjamin H. Hodgson, who was

***In 1982, Ranger Dan Martinez woke up in his bedroom on the upper floor to find an American Indian figure staring down at him.***



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Courtesy Little Bighorn National Monument

Custer battlefield circa 1926. The taller building to the right is the historic Stone House.

reportedly killed in that vicinity in 1876. Later, they were looking through books at the visitors center, when she came across a photograph of Hodgson. Startled, she told her companion, "That's the person I saw in my room last night."

FINALLY, THE MOST powerful set of ghosts along the Little Bighorn may have appeared in the late 1970s to the battlefield's former Plains Indian historian, Mardell Plainfeather, a Crow who lived in the battlefield's government housing. While checking her sweat lodge near the river one evening, she spotted something up on the bluffs. At first she thought someone was playing a trick on her. "There, up on the bluffs with the bright night sky behind them, were the silhouettes of two Indian warriors on horseback," she recalled.

She was somewhat startled, in part, because the National Park Service usually bars horses from the field. "I rubbed my eyes and looked again as one of the warriors lifted himself up on his horse, moving his head from side to side to get a better look at me." Her daughter, who accompanied her to the sweat lodge, also saw the apparition.

Their appearance also was distinctive to Plainfeather, who herself moved easily between her native Crow culture during her off-duty hours and the essentially white culture of the park service. "One [warrior] had flowing hair and the other had braids and they both wore feathers. One had a shield on his back and I could see that the other carried a spear and had a bow and quiver behind him."

Despite the startling presence of the ghostly images, Plainfeather recalled feeling calm, knowing the warriors meant them no harm. A practical woman otherwise, she believes in her vision, although during the archeological projects of the 1980s, she often declined inquiries from the news media about the episode. Her duties included speaking to tourists about the Plains Indian culture and explaining the Indian side of the story of the battle.

"I believe the warriors just wanted to see this Crow woman who was trying to do justice to their point of view," she said. "I believe they appeared just to express their approval of what I was doing."

While other stories about ghostly appearances on the Little Bighorn abound, the spirits apparently are picky about whom they will visit. In 1985, while serving in a public relations role for the park service during the archeological project that spring, I lived in Apartment D on the battlefield. At the time, I was researching the life of Mark H. Kellogg, the *Bismarck Tribune* reporter killed with Custer. I certainly would have welcomed a visit from him. Sadly, he never appeared —nor did any other spirit.

Of course, there was that hot evening I crossed through the battlefield's national cemetery trying to catch up with some friends heading up to Last Stand Hill. As I passed the grave of Major Reno, I was struck by how cold the center of the cemetery felt between the two lines of spruce trees. Yet on the other side of the cemetery by the main visitors parking lot, I found the temperature once again as warm as before.

Surely the eerie coldness must have come from a late spring wind blowing across the grave stones through a natural tree-lined tunnel. Except there was no wind that evening.



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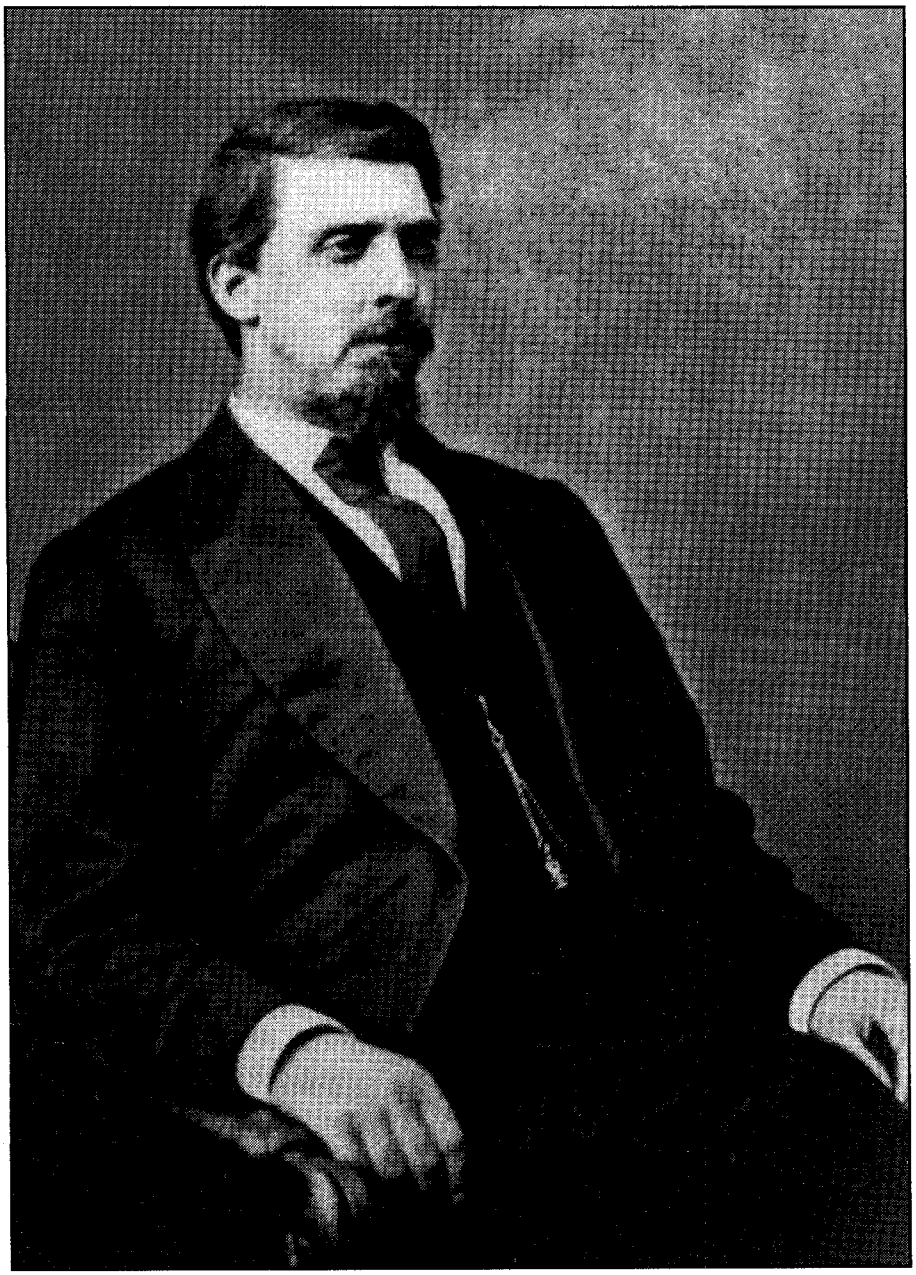
# FORT SMITH'S HAUNTED GALLOWS

## BY GLENN SHIRLEY

From 1871 to 1896, the area of present Oklahoma (exclusive of the panhandle, known as No Man's Land), extending from Arkansas between the Red River and the Kansas border to the panhandle of Texas, was Indian Territory, and a veritable maelstrom of unbridled vice. Indian Territory was under the jurisdiction of the United States Court for the Western District of Arkansas, at Fort Smith. From 1875 to September 1, 1896, when the court's jurisdiction was ended by act of Congress, it was presided over by the illimitable Judge Isaac Charles Parker.



Author's Collection

Judge Isaac Charles Parker.

During these twenty-one years, the mountains and prairies of the territory were overrun by thieves, robbers, and pillagers of all classes. Rape and murder—capital crimes under federal law—were common offenses. The Indian tribes removed to the area beginning in the 1830s had brought their own laws and tribal courts, but the Indian courts took no cognizance of the white intruder, only offenses by one Indian against another. The Fort Smith court, with its squads of deputy United States marshals (scores of whom were slain in the line of duty), dealt with the horrible crimes of red, black, and white alike, accordingly.

During Judge Parker's incumbency, 13,490 criminal cases were docketed, not including some 4,000 petty crimes that got no further than the U.S. commissioners courts. Of this total, 9,454 people were convicted by a trial jury or entered pleas of guilty, 344 being tried for offenses punishable by death. Of those 344, 160 were sentenced to the gallows. Seventy-nine of these were hanged, the others commuted by the president of the United States to terms from ten years to life, or given new trials on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, convicted on charges of smaller degree, or discharged by acquittal or *nolle prosequi* (lack of prosecution). A few died in jail awaiting sentence, or were declared insane and transferred to an asylum.



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Thus the Fort Smith court became the most widely publicized criminal tribunal in the world. People came from as far as London and Paris to observe the proceedings and hear the pronouncements of doom.

A greater attraction was the gallows, a few hundred feet from the soldiers barracks that served as the federal prison and offices for the court, U.S. marshal, and district attorney. It was a strong structure of heavy timbers, with a twelve-by-twelve overhead beam and four trap doors thirty-inches wide and twenty-feet long, furnishing room for a dozen men to stand side by side and drop to eternity simultaneously. It was never taxed to capacity. However, men were hanged singly, in pairs, four, five, and six at a time. The structure was roofed and the back walled so that executions could proceed even in inclement weather.

JUDGE PARKER TOOK pardonable pride in eradicating those who rode roughshod over life and property, and was looked upon by most Indians and whites as the frontier's "rock of security." But there were many who considered only the hangings and believed that none but a heartless judge could be so lacking in compassion. Eastern reporters, yellow journalists, and even a few members of Congress, pointing to the number and frequency of executions with little understanding of conditions in Indian Territory, denounced the judge as "Bloody Parker," "Butcher Parker," and "Old Hell on the Border."

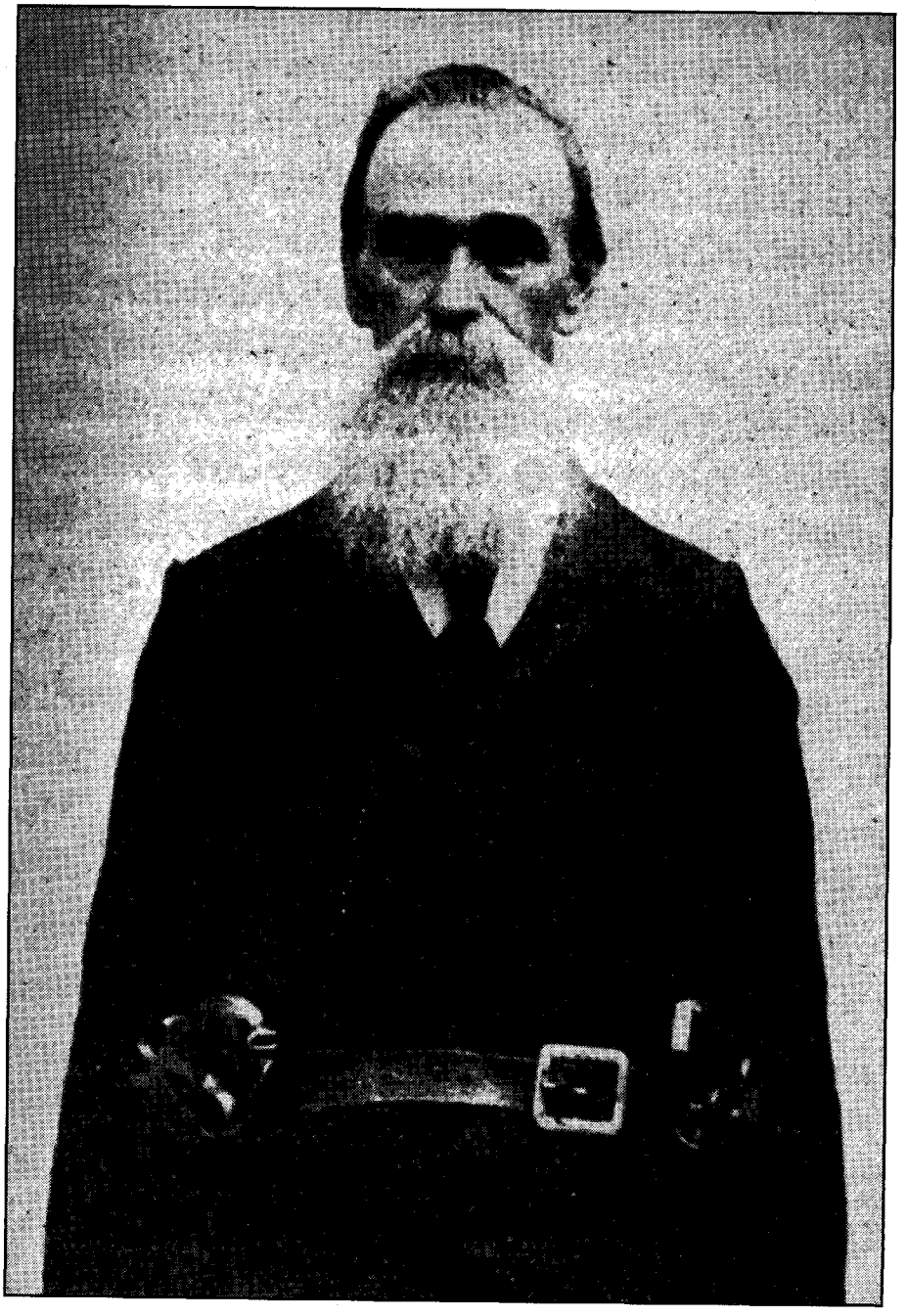
To which Parker replied: "If criticism is due, it should be the system, not the man whose duty lies under it...."

Parker did not desire to hang men. As one local editor and valued correspondent of the New York *Herald* explained: "Because they were preying wolves upon the lives and property of their fellow beings, unfit to live and unsafe to remain at large, society exterminated them from the face of the earth, through the stern mandates of the law."

Fort Smith also bore the brunt of such publicity. Though none of the executions was for a crime committed in the city's limits, or in the state of Arkansas (except in one instance on the United States reservation where the federal jail was situated), strangers shivered at the sight of the monstrous gallows and were wont to inquire "what kind of place Fort Smith was."

Also denounced in the press was the court's official hangman, George Maledon. A wispy, long-whiskered Bavarian with a tight lip and brooding eyes, Maledon had drifted into Fort Smith as a young man, serving in the First Arkansas Federal Battery during the Civil War and as a deputy sheriff and policeman prior to becoming a deputy marshal and guard at the U.S. bastille.

Like Judge Parker, Maledon took great pride in his work. His ropes were made of chosen hemp fiber, woven by hand in St. Louis, and



Author's Collection

George Maledon. Journalists called him the "Prince of Hangmen" and his gallows the "Gates of Hell."



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treated with a pitchy oil substance to prevent slipping. He was proud of his ability to always break the neck of his victim. His secret, he once explained, was "tying a *big* knot." After tightening the noose over the larynx until it touched the skin all around, he placed the knot in the hollow back of the jawbone, brought the rope upward and over the top of the head, allowing it to hang in a curve on the other side "to hold the knot steady under the ear." When the victim dropped through the trap, the rope snapped taut; the big knot threw the head sideways and fractured the spine.

"It's the only humane way to hang a man, not strangle him to death," Maledon said, and accepted with aplomb the monikers tacked on him by journalists—"Prince of Hangmen"—and on the scaffold on which he performed his duties—"The Gates of Hell."

"Get out your oil can, Maledon," was the grim jest of court attaches after each capital conviction. It was his cue to oil the squeaking hinges of the gallows traps. But they had little time to get rusty. He hanged sixty of the seventy-nine men executed during Parker's tenure. He carried two pistols and was an expert shot with either hand. He killed two prisoners who attempted to escape while awaiting trial, and another who cheated the gallows by attempting to escape the night before his execution.

Of special interest were the many stories about the gallows being "haunted." Inmates claimed they frequently saw ghosts standing on the scaffold, and strange beings coming over the fort walls at night with ropes about their necks. One night it was reported that a multitude of spirits gathered on the gallows platform preparatory to making an attack on the prison.

Shortly before retiring from his work in November 1894, Maledon was escorting a group of ladies on a tour of the gallows and jail, when asked: "Do you have any qualms or conscience or fear of the spirits of the men you have hanged?"

His reaction startled the group. He actually threw back his head and laughed. "As to my conscience, " he replied, "I can say I've never hanged a man who didn't deserve it or ever come back to have the job done over.

"As to ghosts, such stories are largely believed by Negroes and superstitious whites. No ghosts ever haunted me. I reckon I hanged them too."

Some thought he might be mistaken, however, following the execution of one Lewis Holder....

Holder was a white man, fifty-two years old. A couple of days before Christmas 1891, he and a friend, thirty-five-year-old George M. Bickford, had left the Poteau River bottoms near Fort Smith to hunt and trap in the San Bois Mountains, Choctaw Nation. Bickford furnished the team, wagon, and camping outfit, Holder the traps, ammunition, and an old shotgun.

Shortly thereafter, Holder returned to the Poteau bottoms with Bickford's outfit and clad in a hunting suit Bickford had been wearing at the time of their departure. When questioned as to how he came in possession of Bickford's property, Holder stated that he had purchased the team and wagon from Bickford with money received on a note he held against a man in St. Louis. Having money in his pocket, Bickford had decided to go to Texas to "see the country." His hunting clothes he had exchanged for a new suit Holder had purchased, desiring a new suit to continue his travels. Holder had left him near the railroad at Hartshorne, but Holder did not know if this had been his mode of transportation to Texas.

It sounded logical, and Poteau bottom neighbors made no further inquiry. After some time, nothing was heard of Bickford or his alleged trip to Texas, and interest in his whereabouts subsided. Then a decomposed, underwear-clad body was suddenly discovered in a lonely ravine in the San Bois by a traveler who had left the main road in search of water.

Deputy marshals investigated and determined the man had been shot from behind, with a shotgun, while he sat in camp. The load had entered the back of the neck and come out at the throat, tearing away the muscles and larynx. Enough of the face remained to identify the dead man as George Bickford.

Holder's story didn't sound so plausible now. He was arrested in the Creek Nation, trying to dispose of Bickford's team and wagon, and taken to Fort Smith, subsequently indicted by a federal grand jury for murder, and finally tried before Judge Parker in September 1892.

Holder admitted killing Bickford the night of December 24, but claimed self defense; that they had quarreled in camp, Bickford tried to kill him with a "slung shot," but "stumbled and fell," enabling Holder to seize the shotgun and fire.

"However," said the Fort Smith *Elevator*, "the district attorney tore his defense all to pieces....The position of the victim as he lay dead, lack of signs of a struggle, and the stories told by Holder on his return to his home...made a strong chain of circumstantial evidence of a trusted partner having been murdered for his possessions, and the jury returned a verdict of guilty after

Maledon threw back his head and laughed. "As to my conscience," he replied, "I can say I've never hanged a man who didn't deserve it or ever come back to have the job done over."



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being out a few minutes." Judge Parker declared from the bench that it was a "most atrocious crime," and sentenced Holder to hang.

Holder expressed hatred for Parker when the judge denied his application for a new trial. He looked upon himself as persecuted. He brooded on this and his hatred grew while his attorneys appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court on general exception to Parker's entire charge to the jury.

The Supreme Court did not rule on Holder's case until October 30, 1893: "There is no pretense that the charge of the [Fort Smith] court...was erroneous in every part, and no exception to any particular part is shown. The rule is that a general exception to a charge, which does not direct the attention of the court to the particular portion of it to which objection is made, raises no question for review."

During the weary intervening months, "Holder's anxiety, coupled with the moments of agonizing fear, told on him, showed in the deep lines of his visage." Yet he held up "amazingly well," and marched back before Judge Parker, "beaming with expectation that his case was to be called up anew."

Nearly 500 men and women crowded the courtroom "as if eager to view the shame and disgrace to be meted out to a fellow mortal." Holder had gained considerable public sympathy, due to the evidence against him being wholly circumstantial, and many felt that he would not again be sentenced to the rope.

**When convinced at last that he would be executed, he declared that he would return in the spirit and haunt the officers and all connected with the court.**

Holder was stunned when the decision of the Supreme Court was read. In a few quiet, earnestly spoken words, Judge Parker then pronounced what Holder had fondly hoped he would never hear—"to be hanged by the neck until dead"—and set the execution date for April 25, 1894.

The courtroom "fell as silent as a grave." The condemned man's face blanched. A tremor convulsed his whole body. He tottered, reeled. A bailiff reached out to catch him, but too late. He screamed and fell to the floor, senseless.

In an instant, all was confusion. Several persons rushed forward to view the prostrate form, believing the man was dead. "A few brisk raps from Judge Parker's gavel restored order, and Holder was carried to the open air, where he recovered."

Back in jail, the prisoner became somewhat an object of pity. A broken man, he prayed to God, whose laws he had outraged, to save him from the gibbet. He begged the guards, deputy marshals, and anyone else who came near his cell to turn him loose. When convinced at

Author's Collection

The United States federal building and jail at Fort Smith at the time of Lewis Holder's conviction.



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last that he would be executed, he declared that he would return in the spirit and haunt the officers and all connected with the court.

The threat spread through Fort Smith. On Tuesday evening, July 24, Holder told an *Elevator* reporter that he wanted Judge Parker and the members of the convicting jury to be present at his hanging as he desired to say something to them.

Early Wednesday morning, Holder's spiritual adviser, Father Pius, of the German Catholic church, visited him in his cell, administered the last sacred rites, and remained in constant attendance upon him until the scaffold platform was reached. After reading the death warrant, U.S. Marshal George Crump asked the usual question. Did he desire to make a statement?

Holder asked that all who had a hand in his conviction to step forward. Of course, none were present. After a pause, he stated that he forgave them all, but added that he thought Judge Parker should resign his office, then go down on his knees and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

Asked about it afterward, Judge Parker said gravely: "I try to be just. But I must fulfill the law, and that is what I tried to do in this case."

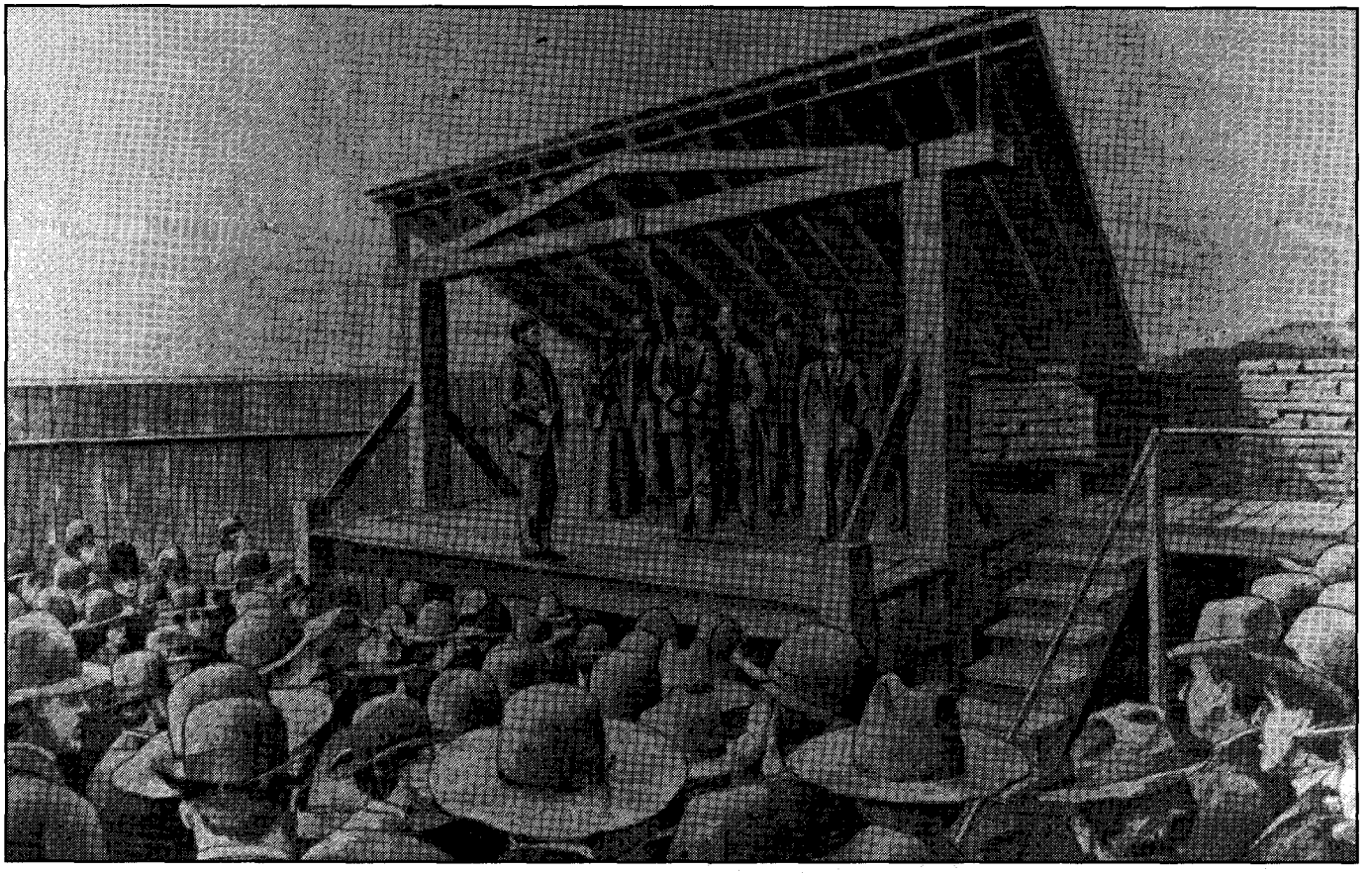
Holder's arms and feet were secured with a string cord. Then Hangman Maledon slipped on the black cap and adjusted the noose around his neck. Seconds later, Holder dangled in space, his neck broken.

Just before midnight, about a month later, Jailer George Lawson and a half-dozen fellow guards were sitting in the jail office when a horrible moaning, unlike anything they had ever heard before, issued from the scaffold. The tones were so weird and expressive of poignant grief that it virtually froze the blood in their veins and caused the hair to rise on their heads. The some 100 prisoners confined in the jail, all awakened by the unearthly sounds, listened with bated breath.

Holder's departure was still on everyone's mind. As the moaning continued, one of the guards exclaimed, in a sepulchral whisper: "Lewis Holder's ghost!"

Lawson had handled many desperate characters and faced death many times. His call for volunteers to investigate the strange sounds met no response, so he went alone. Arriving at the gibbet, Lawson discovered the source of the haunting wails. An old Indian crouched on his knees before the trap doors, looking down through the opening where some of his friends had gone to eternity, praying earnestly and vociferously in Choctaw for their deliverance.

The Indian had come to Fort Smith that evening and drunk whiskey until he was almost demented. The result was a strange midnight escapade that temporarily "haunted" Fort Smith's gallows.



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Fort Smith's "haunted" gallows.



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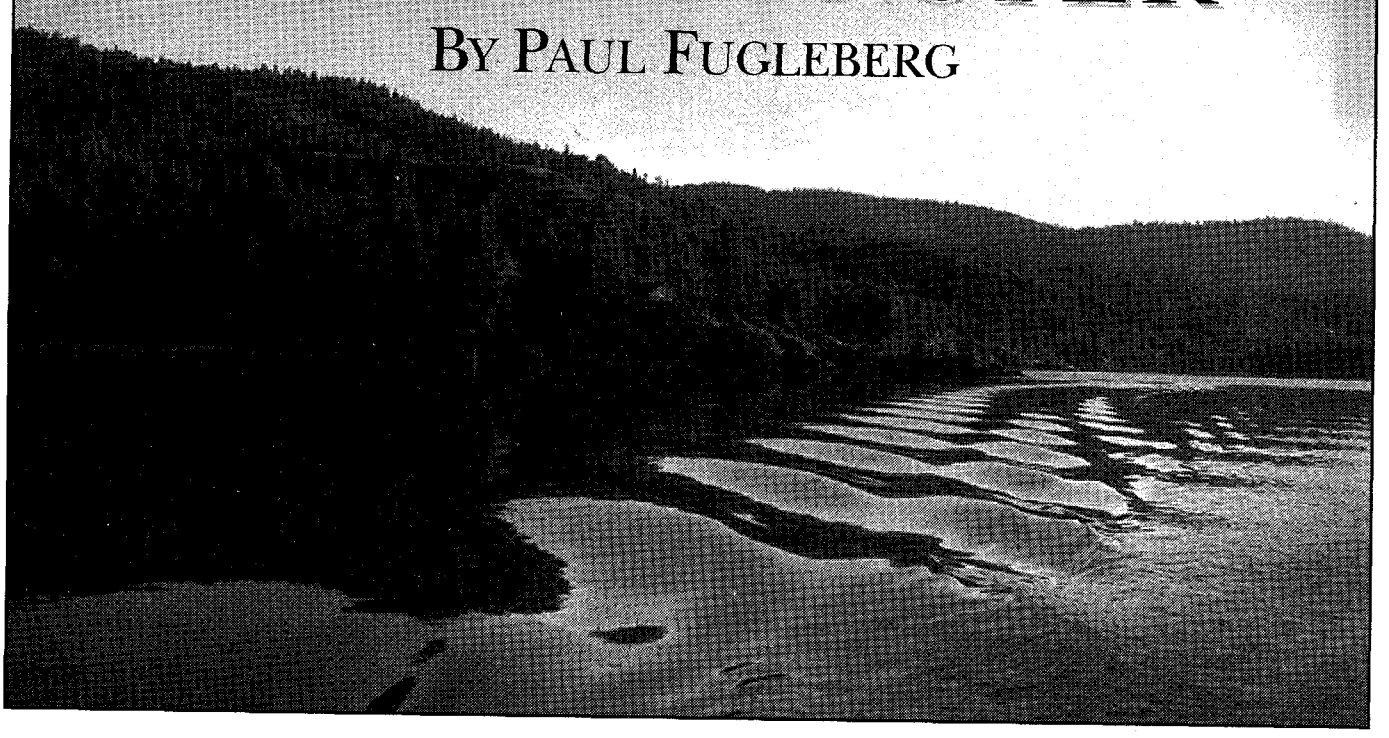
# THE FLATHEAD LAKE MONSTER

By Paul Fugleberg



Waves and shadows sometime combine to give the impression of unusual objects in Flathead Lake.

Paul Fugleberg photo

Call it Montana's "Nessie," a denizen of the deep, a lake lurker, super-sturgeon, the Flathead Lake Monster, or whatever—some strange, watergoing critter has been surprising and startling local residents and visitors in this western Montana resort area for more than a century.

Recorded sightings in twenty-eight-mile long, fifteen-mile wide Flathead Lake seem to have begun one day in 1889 when Captain James Kerr of the small lake steamer, the *U.S. Grant,* thought he saw an approaching boat. As it came closer, it appeared to be a whale-shaped object—scary enough that a passenger fired a rifle shot at the odd critter before it disappeared.

Since that time, at least eighty-four other sightings have been reported. Among the oldest sightings was one that occurred between 1900 and 1903. It was the subject of an interview with Joseph Zelezny in the 1950s, taped by the Reverend and Mrs. Paul Jones near Rollins, Montana. Joseph died in 1956, but his son, Dr. William F. Zelezny, shared the contents of the tape in an article in the Spring 1986 edition of *Yellow Bay Journal,* a publication of the University of Montana biological research station at Yellow Bay, on the east shore of Flathead Lake. The conversation went like this:

Bill Zelezny: "Tell us about spearing the fish you thought was a log."

Joseph Zelezny: "At that time it wasn't against the law, as far as we knew, to spear them so we used the spear on those fish, and we got through with our fishing in two or three hours. There was something unusual laying there on the bottom, and my brother and another man that was with me, with us...were telling me about it, and I handed them the spear and I says, 'Sock that spear into it and see what it is.' They did and it shot out of there like a shot out of a gun. Pretty near upset him and took him into the water. It didn't hold him and tore loose. That was the biggest fish we saw in this lake. The biggest fish."

Mrs. Jones: "How big was it?"

Joseph Zelezny: "It was about twelve feet long."

Mrs. Jones: "What kind was it?"



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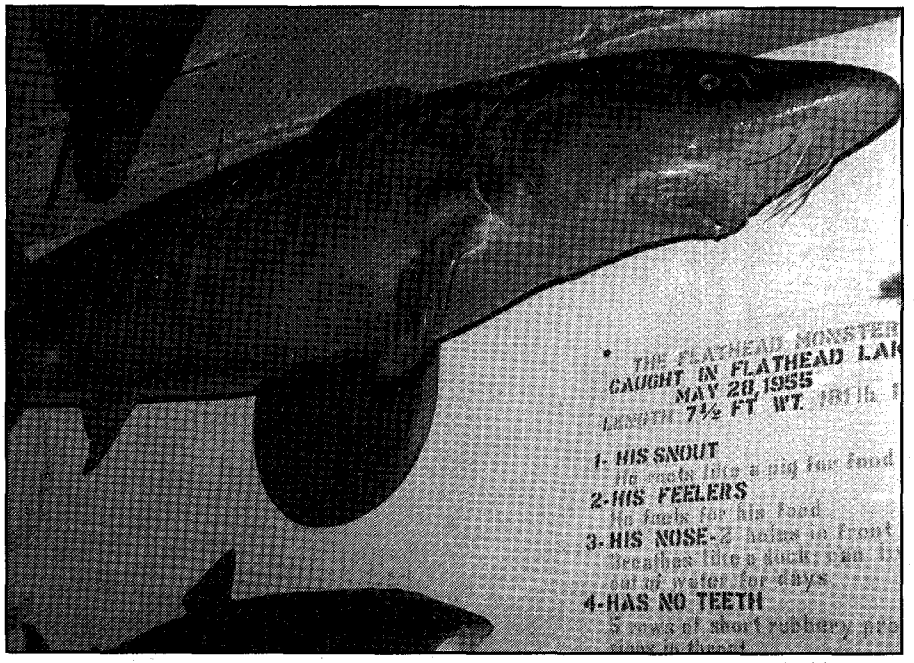



Paul Fugleberg photo

The closest thing to a monster to come out of Flathead Lake so far is this 181-pound white sturgeon, caught in 1955. It now resides in the Polson-Flathead Historic Museum.

> Joseph Zelezny: "I think it was a sturgeon. That's what I think it was. I couldn't describe another fish like it, but still it didn't look exactly like a sturgeon either, but couldn't have been anything else...."

In 1912, stories of strange, big fish in Flathead Lake circulated in the Whitefish community, about twenty miles north of Flathead Lake. Reports were recalled in a letter dated November 1, 1962, by noted western author Dorothy M. Johnson, then the secretary of the Montana State Press Association and faculty member of the University of Montana School of Journalism.

Johnson said she had grown up in Whitefish, and cautioned, "I don't think the monster should be done tongue-in-cheek. You have eyewitness accounts by people who were scared and didn't think it was fun. I remember hearing about *something* in Flathead Lake more than forty years ago, so I don't give the Polson Chamber of Commerce credit for making it up...."

In 1915 there were reports of the sighting of a school of sturgeon in the Clark's Fork River near Plains, Montana, swimming upstream toward Flathead Lake, some sixty miles away. It's unlikely, however, that they could ever have scaled the falls of the "Royal Gorge" of the Pend Oreille (now called the Flathead) River, about five miles southwest of Polson. Those rapids are now covered by water backing up from Kerr Dam.

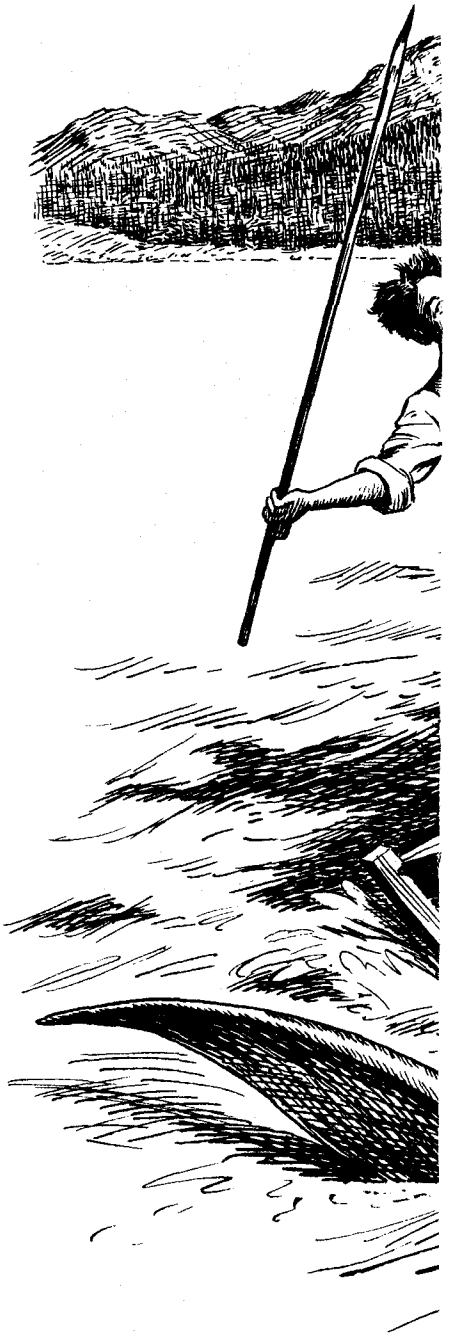
In 1919 there was a report of a huge fish spotted in Flathead Lake from a lake boat identified as the *City of Polson.* Viewed by passengers and crew, the object was at first thought to be a log—until it changed course and swam away. However, the ship in question had to be a vessel other than the *City of Polson.* That gas-powered craft was taken to Glacier National Park's Lake McDonald and renamed the *Lewtana* in 1915.

Another early report of a big fish sighting was described in a letter by Ila Rose Wilcox Chappel of Bigfork, to the *Flathead Courier* in 1965. She told of an incident that occurred more than forty years earlier.

"In the fall of 1922 or 1923, we moved to the east side of Flathead Lake from Denton, Montana...shipping our household furniture by railroad car to Somers and ferrying across by boat and barge—three families of us.

"Near Angel's Point [on the west shore], and quite far out in the middle of the lake, the barge was filling with water and all of our things went into the lake. We lost everything.

"For weeks and months we searched for floating objects in the water and on shore. One time, as my brother was riding in the boat





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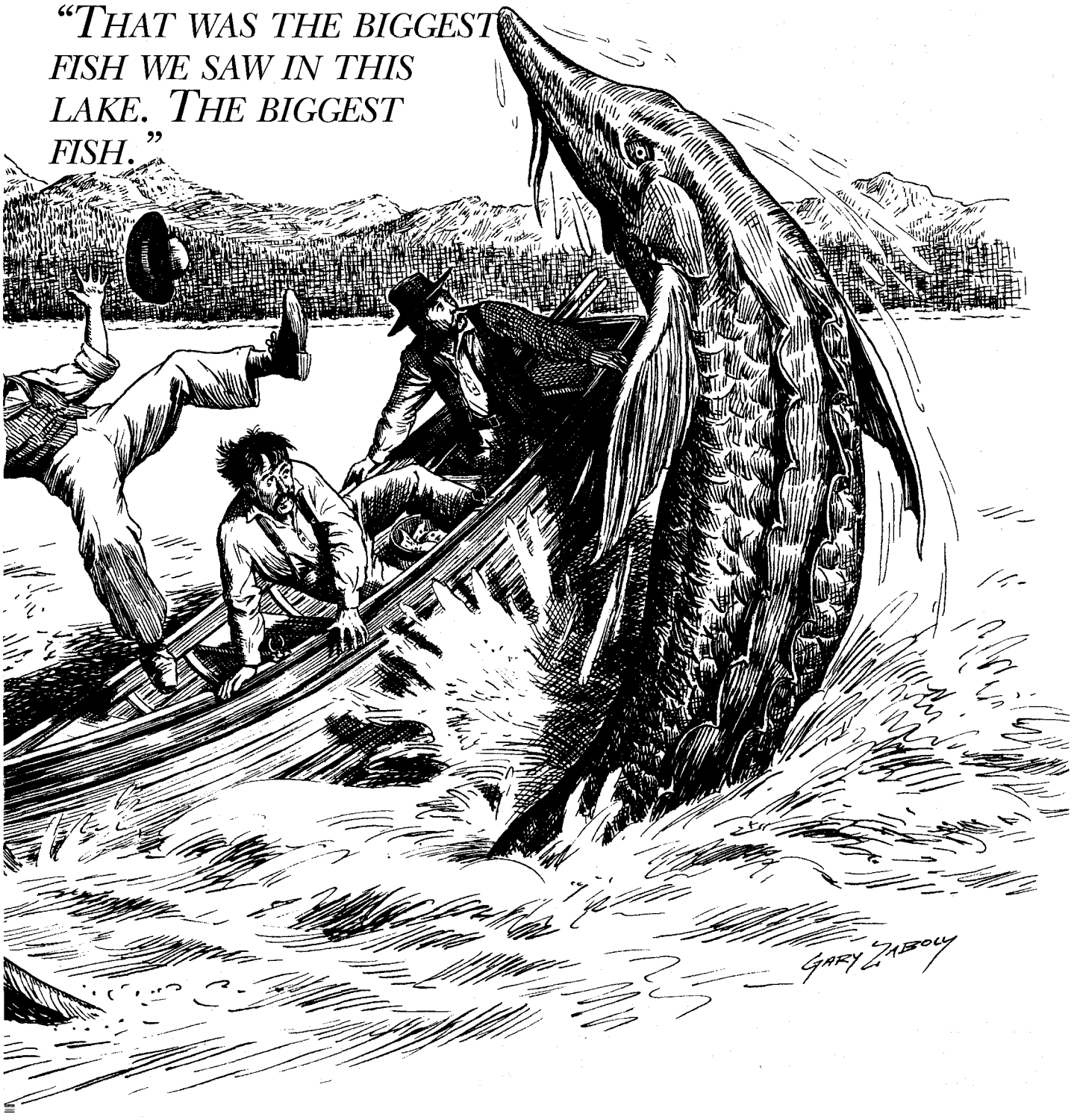
and looking into the water, it seemed he saw a great big log following the boat. Finally it came up alongside and seemed to be passing.

"When my brother said, 'Look!' it flipped its tail and was gone. It was about fifteen-feet long, much longer than the boat it swam alongside. My brother knew sturgeons as he too lived at the Virgille Ferry house [on the Missouri River] and had his picture taken with one about three-feet long.

"I know a man by the name of Doc Vaughn, he is close to ninety years old now...I have heard him tell wonderful, exciting stories about the early days when he came to the Flathead Lake country...He lived among the Indians and trapped and exchanged yarns. There was no white people much passed that way. He was just a young man and liked to roam around, and the Indians were his friends, He mentioned Polson being a town now.

"He said they planted some sturgeons in that lake and he often thought of the days there among




*"THAT WAS THE BIGGEST FISH WE SAW IN THIS LAKE. THE BIGGEST FISH."*



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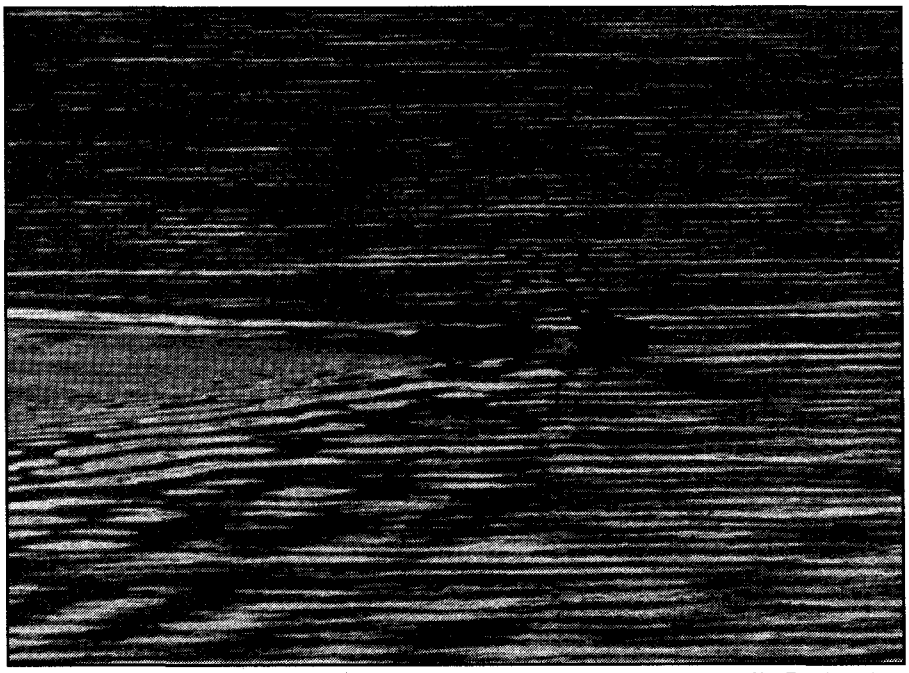


Alan Fugleberg photo

Swimming objects, such as this elk, have been mistaken for monsters on Flathead Lake.

the Indians, and just wondered whatever became of the sturgeons they put there, and if they were still there. "

Among folks reporting sightings or close encounters over the years have been educators, doctors, farmers, ranchers, military personnel, policemen, cherry pickers, merchants, students, year-round residents, summer visitors, and even a former chairman of the state fish and game commission. The vast majority have been sober, a minuscule minority not so sober. Sightings have occurred at all times of the year, all hours of the day, in all parts of the lake.

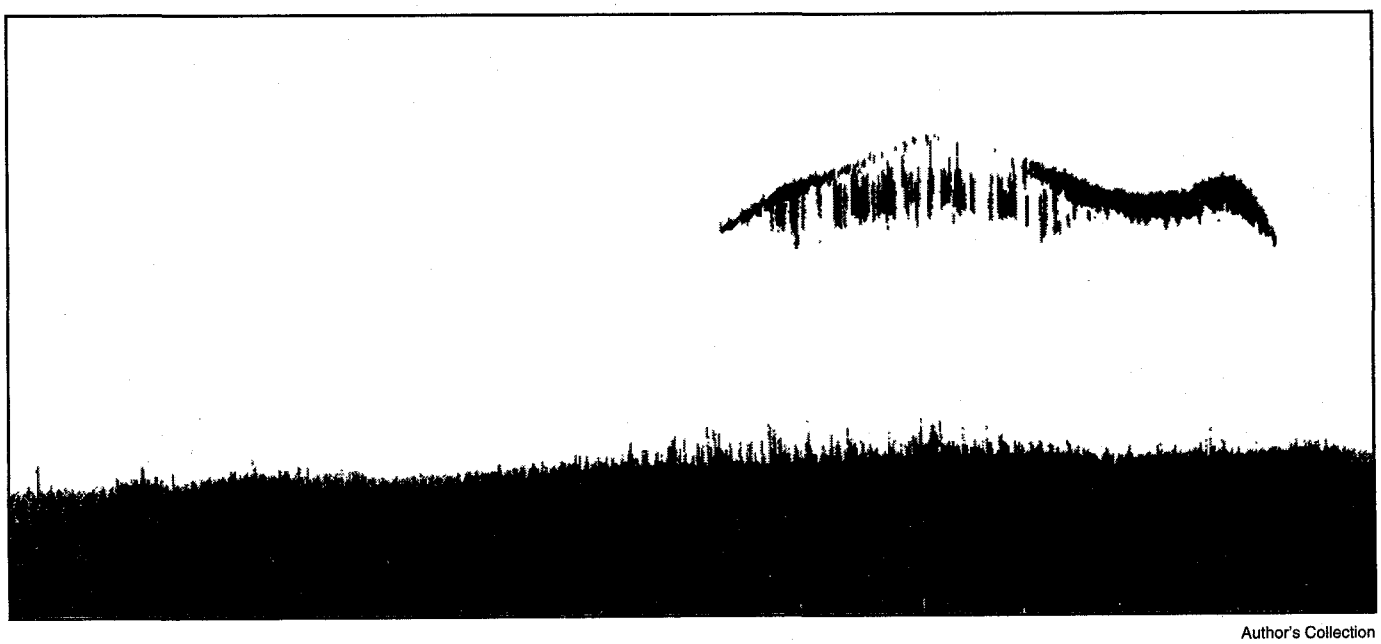
A veteran Montana fish and game warden, the late Bob Lambeth, recalled that in the 1920s commercial fishermen, seining Flathead Lake for whitefish, occasionally found their nets shredded—possibly by giant fish.

Another theory is that sturgeon may have originally reached the lake hundreds of years ago when the old lake outlet near Elmo on the west shore was intact. There, in the Big Draw, they would have found a wide channel and probably no insurmountable rapids.

Some sightings, of course, can be attributed to hyperactive imaginations, playful pranks, or natural phenomena such as wave action, shadows, and lighting effects. A number have involved wildlife. Bear, horses, deer, elk, dogs, a loose circus seal, an escaped buffalo, even a dead monkey have played a part in the legend.

Extensive studies of the Flathead Lake fishery over the years by the state and by the University of Montana have not resulted in any official recognition of the existence of a resident lake monster or superfish. Yet the sightings continue. Incidents favor a fish-shaped object by nearly three to one, although during the past twenty years, serpentine sightings have outscored fish about two to one.

At any rate, there's no lack of good fish stories around Flathead Lake as long as the Montana Nessie remains at large.



Author's Collection

A sonar reading of Flathead Lake in August 1987 disclosed this intriguing shape. The estimated length of the object is fourteen feet. The bottom area is the lake bed.



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# But for the LOVE of a Sister

By Dave Johnson • Illustrations by Kim Mackey

**Almost without exception, the denizens of the after life have been portrayed as malevolent and evil, motivated by their hatred of the living.**

**But, as with all things, there is another side to the stories.**

The supernatural has fascinated mankind for thousands of years. Over the centuries cultures have recorded their tales of demons and vampires, shape shifters and ghosts. Modern readers are doubtless familiar with such fictional figures as Dracula. A classic creation of Irish writer Bram Stoker, Dracula was based on a real prince, Vlad the Impaler, who fought the Turks and acquired a deserved reputation for his cruelty. Vlad, however, was never regarded as "vampire material" by his people and in real life is considered one of their historical heroes.



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Less familiar are the figures of Elizabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess, and Gilles de Rais, Bluebeard, whose evil reputations inspired similar tales and legends. In Icelandic folklore the figures of trolls and ghosts are common. Olaf the Peacock is said to have battled the ghost of Killer-Hrapp, whose murderous rampages could only be stopped when his body was cremated and the ashes scattered at sea. Almost without exception, the denizens of the after life have been portrayed as malevolent and evil, motivated by their hatred of the living. Since the age of cinema it has become a common theme in movies.

But, as with all things, there is another side to the stories.

The settlers who came to Texas in the first half of the nineteenth century were practical, tough, no nonsense men and women. Josiah Wilbarger was no exception. Arriving in Texas in 1828 from Missouri, Wilbarger initially settled his family in Matagorda County. Two years later he resettled along what would later be known as Wilbarger Creek some ten miles north of the present town of Bastrop. At the time his nearest neighbor was seventy-five miles down river. It was not until 1832 that Reuben Hornsby settled close by on the east side of the Colorado River.

Hornsby and Wilbarger were old friends, and the families routinely exchanged visits. On one such visit in August 1833, Wilbarger was introduced to two men named Stanifer and Haynie, both fresh from Missouri. The pair were considering settling in Texas, and Wilbarger agreed to guide them around the country. Two other men, Christian and Strother, accompanied them as they rode up Walnut Creek.

Along the creek they encountered a lone Indian whom they hailed. Taking a single look at five armed men approaching, the man chose discretion over valor and fled. It was at this moment that the men's good judgment and luck left them. Ac-cording to Wilbarger's account, the men had only wanted to talk to the Indian. If so, his precipitous flight should have ended the affair. Instead the party pursued him to the head of Walnut Creek where he found cover in the brush. Disgruntled, the men turned their tired mounts back. Foolishly they anticipated no trouble, and by the time they decided to rest for their lunch, the earlier chase had been put out of their minds. Wilbarger, Strother, and Christian unsaddled their horses and hobbled them. Haynie and Stanifer left their horses saddled and staked them for grazing.

"Brother Josiah," said a soft voice beside him, "you are too weak to go by yourself. Remain here, and friends will come to take care of you before the setting of the sun."

What they did not know was that their quarry had gathered a number of his tribesmen and stalked them to their camp. Now, as the party enjoyed their lunch, they were fired upon. The quintet broke for the cover of some stunted trees nearby. Moments later Strother went down, mortally wounded. Wilbarger and the others returned their attackers' fire. Then Christian was hit, the ball bursting his powder horn and shattering his thigh. Wilbarger sprang to his aid, taking an arrow in the calf of his leg and a flesh wound in his hip. After priming the man's rifle, Wilbarger returned to his own tree to continue fighting. Within seconds he was struck in his other leg by another arrow.

Under the heavy fire, and with two of their companions down, Stanifer and Haynie ran for their mounts while Wilbarger fought on. Seeing that his last two companions were in flight, he attempted to run after them. A rifle ball struck him in the back of the neck, emerging on the left side of his chin. Haynie and Stanifer, thinking he had been killed, fled for the safety of Hornsby's home.

Elated by their victory, the attackers emerged from the brush. Strother and Christian's throats were quickly slashed to finish them off. Wilbarger's throat wound appeared fatal, and he was quickly stripped of his clothing, except one sock, and scalped. The Indians rode off with the captured horses, leaving their victims behind.

Wilbarger, however, was not dead. The bullet had paralyzed him, but during his ordeal he remained conscious. Shortly after the scalping, Wilbarger fainted. When he recovered consciousness it was already late in the afternoon. Realizing that his only chance for life was to reach Hornsby's home, some six miles away, he began to crawl. He was able to go some six hundred yards before collapsing under an oak tree. The night was cold, and Josiah clearly realized the reality of his situation. He had no food, and nothing to carry water in. Flies and maggots were at work on his wounds. He had no clothing and no way to stop the bleeding. There was no chance that he could reach Hornsby's. Unless help arrived, another day would finish him.

"Brother Josiah," said a soft voice beside him, "you are too weak to go by yourself. Remain here, and friends will come to take care of you before the setting of the sun." Josiah's eyes widened in surprise, for beside him was his sister, Margaret Clifton, whom he had thought was back in Missouri. When she was sure that he understood her, she moved off in the direction of Hornsby's home.

Stanifer and Haynie had reached Reuben Hornsby safely with the tale of the attack. They had seen Wilbarger fall and surrounded by a large band of Indians. Both men were convinced that all three of their companions were dead. The men at the ranch judged that it was too late to retrieve the bodies and planned to start out the next day.



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Their departure was earlier than they anticipated.

The night proved troubling for Sarah Hornsby, Rube's wife. Starting from her sleep, she woke her husband and told him that she had dreamed of Josiah Wilbarger, seeing him naked, scalped, and wounded. She had the impression that he was alive. Hornsby, a practical man, convinced her that it was only a dream, and they went back to sleep. The dream quickly returned, more vivid than ever, and Sarah woke in a cold sweat. "I know that Wilbarger is not dead," she told her husband.

Something was clearly happening, and Reuben Hornsby was no fool. Gathering his men, the party set out to find Wilbarger well before daybreak. The men found him beneath an oak tree exactly as Sarah Hornsby had described. Josiah was carried back to the Hornsby home and nursed back to health.

Josiah Wilbarger survived, but his head wound never healed entirely. He lived another eleven years, dying after striking his head against the lintel of a low door. This was all in the future, however, and as soon as he was able he asked about his sister Margaret. To his surprise, no one had seen her. It was not for some time that the news came. Margaret had died in Florisant, Missouri, some seven hundred miles away, the same day that Josiah Wilbarger had been attacked. But for the love of a sister, who had reached beyond the grave, Josiah Wilbarger would have died in the wilds of Texas.

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# BOOKMART

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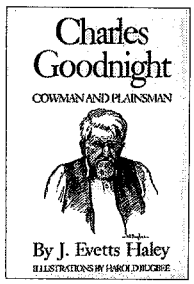


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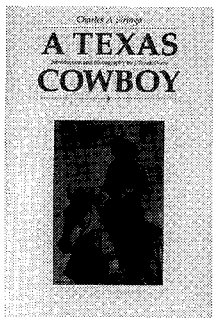


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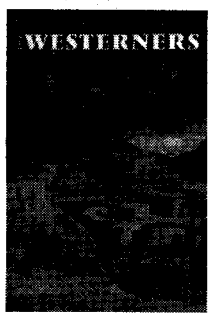


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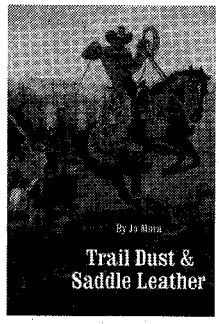


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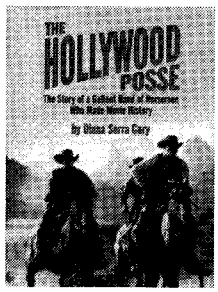


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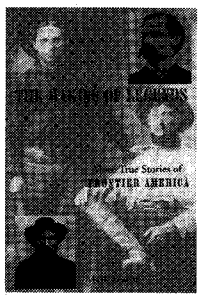

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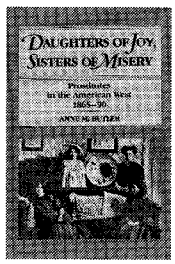


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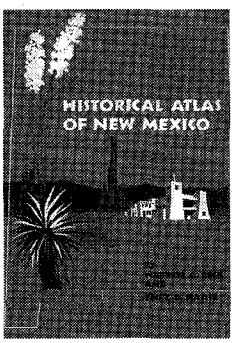


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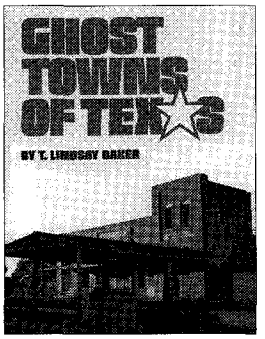


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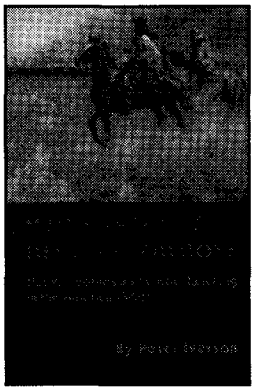

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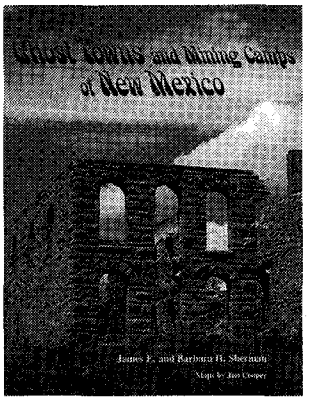


**577—GHOST TOWNS AND MINING CAMPS OF NEW MEXICO.** *By James E. & Barbara H. Sherman.* One hundred thirty of New Mexico's old and defunct communities comprise this historical and pictorial journey. A cross section of New Mexico's legacy from the frontier past unfolds in an array of 450 photographs and highlights of the history and adventures of the people who lived there. 270p. University of Oklahoma Press.

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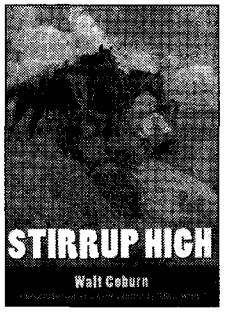


**594—STIRRUP HIGH.** —*by Walt Coburn* Coburn describes his experiences as a teenager on his father's 30,000 acre spread in Montana, the Circle C. As a smallish youth—only "stirrup high" to his pony—he works on the Circle C and learns a lot from his scrapes and falls. *Stirrup High* conveys all the know-how atmosphere of roughing it on a ranch in 1903. 193p. University of Nebraska Press.

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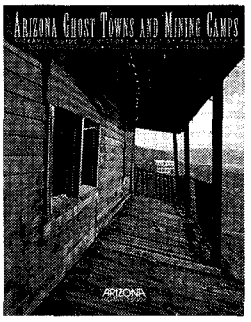


**529—ARIZONA GHOST TOWNS AND MINING CAMPS: A TRAVEL GUIDE TO HISTORY.** *By Philip Varney.* A publication of *Arizona Highways* magazine, this is a visually rich book that also serves as a useful travel guide to an excellent assortment of Arizona ghost towns. Included with top-notch color photography are many historical photographs and regional road maps. Route instructions are included, as well as a glossary of mining terms. 136p. Arizona Highways. **Paper, $14.95**



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# BOOKMART

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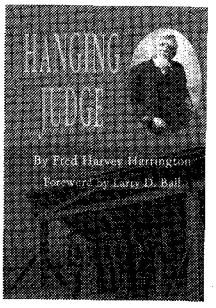


**602—HANGING JUDGE.** *By Fred Harvey Harrington.* Long out of print, Harrington's book focuses on Isaac Parker, the stern Indian Territory judge who tried and sentenced to death more murderers than any other judge in U.S. history. Although he sent 79 convicted felons to the gallows, he also passed sentences on thousands of other criminals, bringing order to a lawless frontier. This edition includes a foreword by Larry Ball. "Scholarly and well-written"—American Historical Review. 224p. University of Oklahoma Press.

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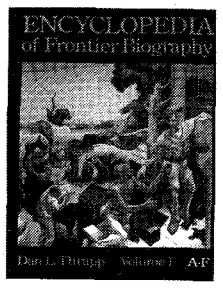


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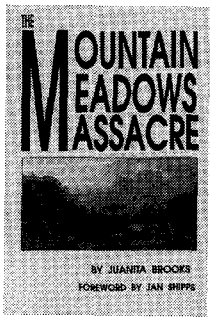


**466—THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE.** *By Juanita Brooks.* This book remains the definitive study of the attack on an emigrant wagon train in southern Utah by Indians and Mormons. One of the worst atrocities in the history of the westward movement, the incident has generated controversy since its occurence in 1857. "Completely objective"—*Journal of the West.* 326p. University of Oklahoma Press.

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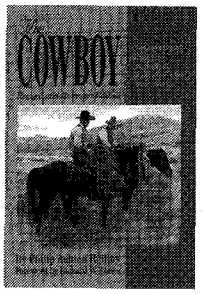


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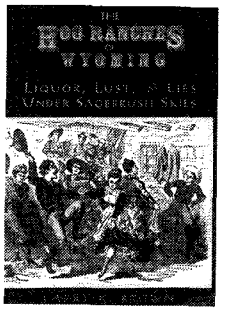


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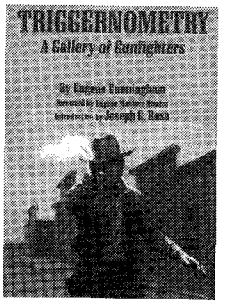


**603—TRIGGERNOMETRY: A GALLERY OF GUNFIGHTERS.** *By Eugene Cunningham; intro by Joseph G. Rosa.* First published in 1941, Cunningham's long popular volume features biographies of nearly a score of the Old West's most notable gunfighters, including Hardin, the Kid, Hickok, Cassidy, and Horn. A Westerner himself, Cunningham knew firsthand several of the Texas gunfighters profiled in his book. This new edition includes and extensive and updated bibliography by Rosa. 446p. University of Oklahoma Press.

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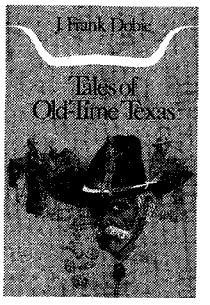


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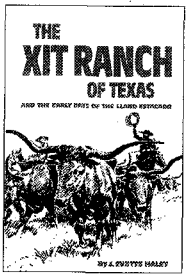


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# AN ILLUSTRATED RIDE WIT

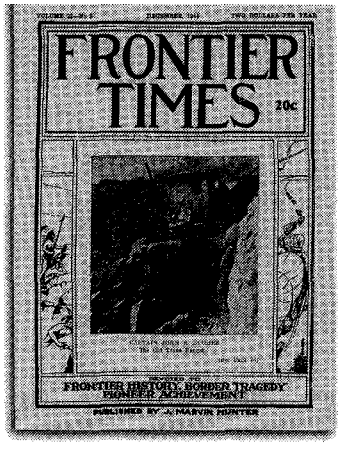
*Outlaws—The Illustrated History of the James-Younger Gang* by Marley Brant. (Elliott & Clark, P.O. Box 551, Montgomery, AL 36101. 224 pp. Index, sources and bibliography. 215 illustrations. $29.95. Hardcover.)

With her first book, *The Outlaw Youngers: A Confederate Brotherhood,* published in 1992, Marley Brant showed convincingly she could discover important information by meticulous research and write well. She continued researching the lives of America's most famous criminals, and now *Outlaws* is available, a pictorial history of the James and Younger gang. Through short chapters, each illustrated with many photographs, documents, and drawings, she has woven the historical events that produced the gang from the parents of both sets of brothers through the final days of Frank James and Cole Younger, the last survivors of the band which had terrorized trains and banks for years, and at the same time created a legend which is known throughout the world.

Although many of the illustrations will be familiar to most readers, there are numerous images which are published for the first time. Along with a photograph of Bruce Younger, brother-in-law of Louis Dalton, the father of the infamous Dalton brothers, is a photograph of the marriage license of Bruce Younger and Belle Starr! This certainly is among the most exciting discoveries. Other new (to this reviewer) images include gang members Dick Liddil and Robert Newton Ford. There are numerous photos of members of the James and Younger families who did not engage in robberies but whose lives were torn apart by what the brothers did.

Any work which contains this number of photographs dealing with outlaws will certainly come in for some close scrutiny by skeptics. Several previously published images have been challenged as not being authentic, but Brant herself indicates her belief or doubt in cases where the provenance is less than concrete. Brant's *Outlaws* does finally provide a significant pictorial contribution to the outlaw genre. It is surprising that a photographic


YESTERDAY...

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# THE JAMES GANG

study of such famous outlaws has not been done before, as the amount of illustrative material dealing with the Missouri brigands is immense, compared to almost any other western gang. Combining Brant's detective skills in discovering factual material not previously available with the photographs, and her enjoyable writing style, results in a historically accurate, informative, and significant contribution to western history.—*Chuck Parsons, Yorktown, Texas.*

### SURVEYING THE WEST

*Drawing the Borderline,* edited by Dawn Hall. (Albuquerque Museum. Distributed by the University of New Mexico Press, 1720 Lomas Blvd., NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131. 156pp. $29.95. Paper.)

Technically, Commissioner John R. Bartlett's survey of our border with Mexico after the Mexican War was a failure. The line that he drew, in an amicable compromise with his opposite number from Mexico, was attacked by his own surveyors, United States Army officers, and his own successor, Major William H. Emory. Bartlett was not only given the boot, his agreement was rejected by a Washington concentrating on Manifest Destiny, which was a *carte blanche* okay given to westward expansion by public sentiment. It fostered dreams of would-be railroad builders and pro-slavery partisans of looting Mexico of still more land. Some wanted to gobble up the whole *Republica*!

Bartlett, a Whig who was anti-slavery and "soft" on expansion, was repudiated by an administration and Congress dominated by Southern Democrats. A new boundary was determined by the Gadsden Purchase of 1854 This added New Mexico's Mesilla Valley and more of Arizona, the section south of the Gila River, to the United States.

Bartlett lost his battle, but in the end, he won the war. Today, his opponents are largely forgotten, while his book, *Personal Narrative of Exploration* is a regional classic rivaling Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies.* A skillful writer and a very talented "amateur" artist, his book opened the eyes of easterners for the first time to the stark, dramatic beauty of a *terra incognita,* the desert Southwest. He also hired Henry Chever Pratt, a professional painter of the famed Hudson River School, to accompany his expedition. And after he returned East, Bartlett had the talented Army officer, Seth Eastman, add some images

This book, subtitled *Artist-Explorers of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Survey,* grew out of an exhibition of drawings, watercolors, and oil paintings at the Albuquerque Museum. It is an excellent, extra-illustrated appreciation of our border as of about 1850. The forty-six black and white illustrations and thirty-five full-color plates "wag" a good text composed of brief essays by several western and art historians.—*Richard H. Dillon, Mill Valley, California.*

### UTAH WAGON ROADS

*Trailing the Pioneers: A Guide to Utah's Emigrant Trails, 1829-1869,* edited by Peter H. DeLafosse Logan. (Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322. 126pp. $10.95. Paper.)

Once in a while, a historical guidebook exceeds the call of duty, in this case, by a country mile. Small wonder that the Oregon-California Trails Association has given this volume its official blessing.


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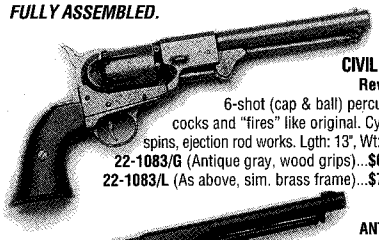

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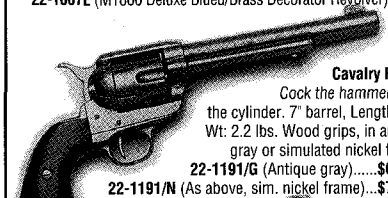

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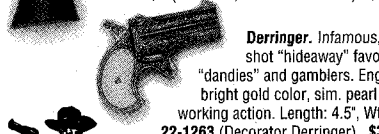

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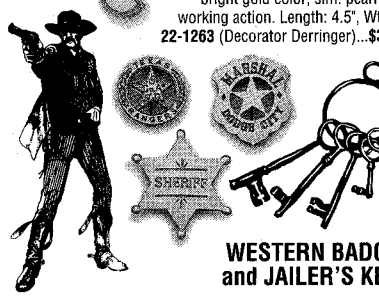


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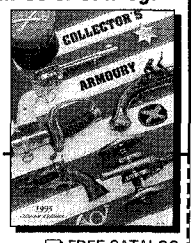


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Not content to just give us general itineraries, the contributors provide us with detailed descriptions of the routes across Utah, then show them to us on many excellent small area/large scale maps. There are, alas, few photographs, but the book gives readers clear driving directions to all key sites. There is an index, and a fine, annotated bibliography for background reading.

The earliest route is the Old Spanish Trail, which looped past today's Moab and Green River, Utah, on its way from Santa Fe to Los Angeles. The most historic spot on it is often left off of gas station road maps but it is here. Mountain Meadows was the site of the terrible massacre in 1857, of Arkansas emigrants by Indians egged on by John D. Lee's Mormon renegades.

The Mormon (or Pioneer) Trail is here, of course, but also the exact route of the Bidwell-Bartleson Party, whose so-called Pilgrims pioneered in 1841 the parallel Oregon, or Overland, Trail. Its dangerous "shortcut," the Hastings Cutoff, which doomed many of the Donner Party to death and cannibalism, contains lonely Skull Valley, with its associations with Jedediah Smith and John C. Fremont, besides Lansford Hastings, himself.

This handy guide is a "must" for history buffs traveling the old trails to the Far West today.—*Richard H. Dillon, Mill Valley, California.*

### Cheyenne Life

*Cheyennes at Dark Water Creek,* by William Y. Chalfant. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1005 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73079. $27.95. Cloth.)

The great chief Seattle said "The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth." Indians conceived that land was sacred and not to be foolishly bartered away, while whites held that land was for the use of those who could pay or seize it.

*Cheyennes at Dark Water Creek,* by attorney William Y. Chalfant, tells the tragic story of the Southern Cheyennes who believed in the inviolability of the land. Chalfant's excellently researched and presented brief takes these people from the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 on through the many skirmishes and firefights known as the Red River War.

Medicine Lodge forbade the tribes to stray far from their reservations in the western Oklahoma of that day but allowed them hunting privileges in specified areas until the buffalo were gone. Yet, Congress, embroiled as usual in endless rounds of appropriations, never got around to ratifying the treaty, while the Southern Cheyennes doggedly refused to abandon their hunting grounds far to the south. Here was a potentially explosive mixture

Minor engagements followed until Sheridan's troopers, attempting to enforce the treaty, clashed with a Cheyenne band at Colorado's Beecher Island in the fall of 1868. The following year was no better with escalating raids on trappers, settlers, and even coach lines. Then on July 11, 1869, seven companies of the Fifth Cavalry struck a Cheyenne encampment in the Valley of the Platte. The Indians under Tall Bull were totally surprised and put up a stout resistance but the village was overrun with fifty-two Cheyennes slain.

For several years after that, the southern bands of Cheyennes were convinced any further resistance was futile, but more fighting loomed.

The Southern Cheyennes bided their time at the agencies, but in early 1874, another railroad threatened to claim the land. Aware also that the great buffalo herds were being decimated by hide hunters, the Cheyennes migrated southward to the headwaters of the Washita and Red rivers in the Texas Panhandle, thus beginning the conflict known as the Red River War and by the tribes as the War to Save the Buffalo.

Many lives were lost on both sides during that year but then it seemed Nature turned her back upon the Southern Cheyennes as they campaigned across the heat-blasted Staked Plains where temperatures soared over 110 degrees. Later they were beset by bitter winter while



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even their food ran out. By March 1875, most had drifted back to their agency on the North Canadian River.

One band determined to remain free—no manacles for them nor exile in some place called Florida. Headed by Little Bull, nearly two hundred made a desperate bid to reach the tentative security of the north. But this last move was doomed.

Special Orders Number 38 issued from General Pope's headquarters stated that the renegades' flight was to be halted and if they resisted they were to be defeated. Second Lieutenant Henley left Fort Wallace, Kansas, on April 19 with forty-four men of the Sixth Cavalry. Four days later, a party of hide-hunters reported to Henley they'd found the fugitives on the middle fork of North Kansas Sappa Creek, the Dark Water Creek of the Cheyennes.

On April 23, when dawn's red warpaint streaked the East, Henley's troopers hit the camp, but the Cheyennes were ready. Two cavalrymen were shot from their saddles in the first exchange. Then both sides dug in along the creek's sandy banks and got down to long range fire. But the Cheyennes' hoarded ammunition gradually gave out and within three hours it was finished. While there'd be later talk of a complete massacre, only twenty-seven Cheyennes were reported killed. Though the rest of the camp was able to escape northward to some sort of safety at the Red Cloud Agency, the War to Save the Buffalo was done.

And so the country beloved by the Cheyennes was finally run over, and the Earth herself profaned. The old Cheyenne life was now a dream. As one of the Blackfeets said, "That life is the flash of a firefly in the night—the breath of a buffalo in winter time. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."—*Bill Garwood, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.*


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ANSWER MAN BY CHUCK PARSONS

# ADOBE WALLS:

## SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

I never claimed to avoid all mistakes! In the March column I attempted to answer a question dealing with the two battles taking place in the Texas Panhandle. Several readers wrote, pointing out my errors.

Leslie Monden, Stinnett, Texas, noted "a small discrepancy," in that the two battles, although fought close in location, were not on the same spot. William Bent built Fort Adobe in the 1840s on Bent's Creek just north of the Canadian River in what is now Hutchinson County, Texas. The first Battle of Adobe Walls took place there on November 26, 1864. Famed scout Kit Carson took refuge behind the walls of the abandoned fort before making the wise decision to retreat when his small expedition faced several thousand Plains Indians.

The second "Battle of Adobe Walls" took place ten years later but it was approximately one mile north of the first battle site. "Adobe Walls" was the name given to the buffalo hunters' outpost because the walls of the old Fort Adobe could be seen from the new camp. Basically the "new" Adobe Walls consisted of Myers & Leonard's Store & Stockade, O'Keefe's Blacksmith Shop, Hanrahan's Saloon, and Rath & Wright's Store & Corral.

Since the Southern Plains Indian tribes saw this buffalo hunting camp as a direct violation of the 1867 Medicine Lodge Treaty, they mounted an attack that they hoped would send a clear message to Washington to stop the slaughter of the buffalo herds. Several hundred Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors had massed for the battle on the morning of June 27, 1874, their leader being famed Quanah Parker. There were twenty-eight men and one woman inside the "walls." After initial attacks, the deadly fire from the hunters kept the Indians at a distance. Then it became a matter of the Indians starving the hunters out, but a "scratch shot" from famed buffalo hunter Billy Dixon, later measured at almost a mile, discouraged the Indians and the hunters were left alone.

Courtesy of Leslie Monden

Comanche warrior Yellowfish, last Indian survivor of the 1874 battle of Adobe Walls, and Olive Dixon, widow of buffalo hunter Billy Dixon, at the unveiling of the Adobe Walls historical marker, October 1941.

No one can say with certainty how many casualties the Indians suffered in this three-day engagement, but the hunters lost only four men, one of whom had accidentally shot himself while descending a ladder.

Two red granite monuments honoring the second Battle of Adobe Walls, are located at the site, which was excavated in the mid-1970s. They are on land donated to the Panhandle Plains Historical Society which is open to the public. Another monument stands on the site of the original Adobe Walls site a mile south of the excavated site. It is located on the Turkey Track Ranch but not open to the public.

An Indian monument was erected in October 1941, after a successful effort led by two participants of the second battle, Yellowfish and Timbo. Since that time descendants from both sides, including the families of Quanah Parker and Billy Dixon,



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have made memorable pilgrimages to the site.

Leslie Monden is a lifetime resident and local historian of Stinnett, which is only fifteen miles (as the crow flies) southwest of Adobe Walls. Monden noted that Billy Dixon earned the Medal of Honor for his action during another engagement with Indians, but the government later took it from him because he was a civilian scout. In 1992, the medal was reinstated to his family during an historical ceremony at Adobe Walls. Dixon's daughter and grandchildren were in attendance.

Another letter was from Red Steagall, of Fort Worth, Texas. He also noted the distance between the two Adobe Walls sites. He should know. "I grew up across the river from the Adobe Walls battleground and have spent a good portion of my life traveling in that country afoot and horseback. Although neither site shows any remnants of buildings today, there are plenty of markers and maps to identify the location of the buildings at the buffalo hunters' fortifications," he wrote.

The monument at the site of the first battle reads as follows:

> The Battle of Adobe Walls was fought here November 25, 1864, when Colonel Christopher (Kit) Carson (1809-1868) with a few companies of United States troops under the protection of the Adobe Walls attacked a band of hostile Kiowa and Comanche Indians and killed over 60 braves. This was "Kit" Carson's last fight.
>
> Erected by the State of Texas.

Another marker erected by the state informs the visitor that it was the largest Indian battle in the Civil War (although it had nothing to do with the Civil War) and that there were 3,000 Comanches and Kiowa allies who met 372 Federal soldiers under Colonel Carson. It also adds: "Though Carson made a brilliant defense —called greatest fight of his career—the Indians won." In addition it points out that some of the


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Indians who fought in the first battle also fought in the second battle and lost, "though they outnumbered 700 to 29 the buffalo hunters whose victory helped open the Panhandle to settlement."

## Which Earp Was It?

Perhaps every western town wants some type of connection to the Earp saga. Long time *True West* reader Terry L. Ommen, Visalia, California, is a historian and current president of the Tulare County Historical Society of California. As a writer of historical articles about the county he has spent many hours reading and researching the files of the local newspaper, the Visalia *Times Delta*. He came across the following item in the *Delta* which begs many questions:

> A brother of Wyatt Earp, the referee of the Fitzsimmons-Sharkey [boxing] match, resided in this city in an early date and he was engaged in the banking business. He was manager of the Faro Bank.

The *Delta* editor obviously had a sense of humor, but we could only wish he had identified the Earp brother! Mr. Ommen wishes to know if there is any way to determine which brother this was who was involved in the "banking business."

Of the possibilities there are Morgan S., Virgil Walter, James C., Baxter Warren, and the half-brother Newton. All of them, as well as Wyatt, were gamblers at one time or another and all spent at least some time in California. Visalia was founded in 1852 and the fight was in 1896, thus we have a definite time frame.

James C. Earp (1841-1926) was in California briefly in 1864 with the family but by 1865 was in Montana. He apparently was not in California again until he accompanied the body of the murdered Morgan to the family home in Colton in 1882. It's doubtful the "banker" was James because of the apparent brief time spent in California.

Morgan (1851-1882) was with the family when the Earps moved to Colton in 1864. He soon returned to Missouri and apparently spent his remaining years in Kansas, South Dakota, Montana, and then Arizona where he was killed in 1882. Since he was but thirteen when in California he was not in the gambling circuit. Morgan was not the faro banker.

Newton (1837-1928) served in the Civil War, then lived his adult years in Missouri and Kansas. He apparently went to California much later and died near Sacremento. We probably can eliminate him also due to the known places where he lived when Visalia could be called "young. "

Virgil W. (1843-1905) served also during the Civil War, during which time his death was falsely reported. On his return home he found the family had gone on, believing him dead. He then relocated in Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory, then Prescott, Arizona, and finally San Bernadino, California, arriving there on December 22, 1865. Between 1866-68 he and Wyatt


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served as teamsters between Wilmington, California, and Prescott, Arizona. Then Virgil moved on, spending time in Wyoming, Nebraska, and Arizona. He also accompanied brother Morgan's body to Colton. He was later elected city marshal of Colton in 1887, then established a gambling hall in Vanderbilt, California. Virgil obviously spent more time in California than the others, save Wyatt, so Virgil is a distinct possibility, as is Warren.

But there are two problems: it was not uncommon for a western newspaper to pick up an item from some other publication *without citing the original source.* Thus, this Earp may have been a banker in some other town altogether. And, unless one reads all the extant *Delta* newspapers in hopes of finding a solid clue or statement placing the Earp brother there in Visalia, it will probably remain only an item of speculation as to which Earp ran the Faro Bank.

Of course there are many Earp experts and pseudo-experts in our readership and we would certainly welcome further information on this question.

## J.P. Bell and Billy the Kid

Darren Smitch, Seattle, Washington, had a great great uncle named J.P. Bell who was a Texas Ranger in El Paso and supposedly had some dealings with Billy the Kid. "I was told that he was involved when Billy got the gun out of the outhouse and escaped. Can you fill in the names of the Rangers or sheriffs involved in that episode of Billy's tale?"

It is possible your uncle, J.P. Bell, had some kind of dealings with the Kid. However, I believe the Kid's only "connection" with the Texas Rangers was trying to avoid them. He did do some "cattle business" in Texas, where the Rangers perhaps had him on their "wanted" lists, but he was not the notorious figure in Texas as he later became in New Mexico.

Could J.P. Bell be the same as Montgomery Bell? If so then the encounter with Billy the Kid was that after the jail escape, in which *James W. Bell* and Olinger were both killed, and the Kid stole a man named Montgomery Bell's horse. Reportedly the Kid stated that he would either return the horse or else pay for it. Some claim that the reason the Kid was in Fort Sumner the night he was killed is that he wanted to borrow money from a Montgomery Bell.

But I think what has happened with this apparent family history item is that during the years Uncle Bell's name was confused with the name of jailer J.W. Bell. I know of no source indicating jailer Bell was "involved when Billy got the gun out of the outhouse and escaped," other than being killed shortly thereafter.

The man who became deputy under Pat Garrett and was killed by the Kid was a Georgia native, born about 1853 of parents who were from Virginia. The 1880 Lincoln County Federal Census shows him to be a miner by occupation. Not long before he had been in Dallas, Texas, planning to go on a mining expedition to Colorado. One newspaper item identified him as an ex-Texas Ranger.

The problem here is that the records of the Texas Rangers are not complete and the only J.W. Bell whose record remains applied for a pension in the early twentieth century, thus there were at least two J.W. Bells during this time frame in Texas. And the term "ranger" was used in a much looser sense in the nineteenth century than today.

I think the family tradition has confused two Bells, linking one with a Billy the Kid incident in which he did not participate.

If you have a question, send it to Chuck Parsons, Western Publications, P.O. Box 2107, Stillwater, OK 74076. Please keep questions brief. Sign your full name and address, including zip code. Names will be published if question is used. Space limitations may not permit us to use all questions. Due to the volume of mail, we cannot forward correspondence to people whose questions appear in "Answer Man."


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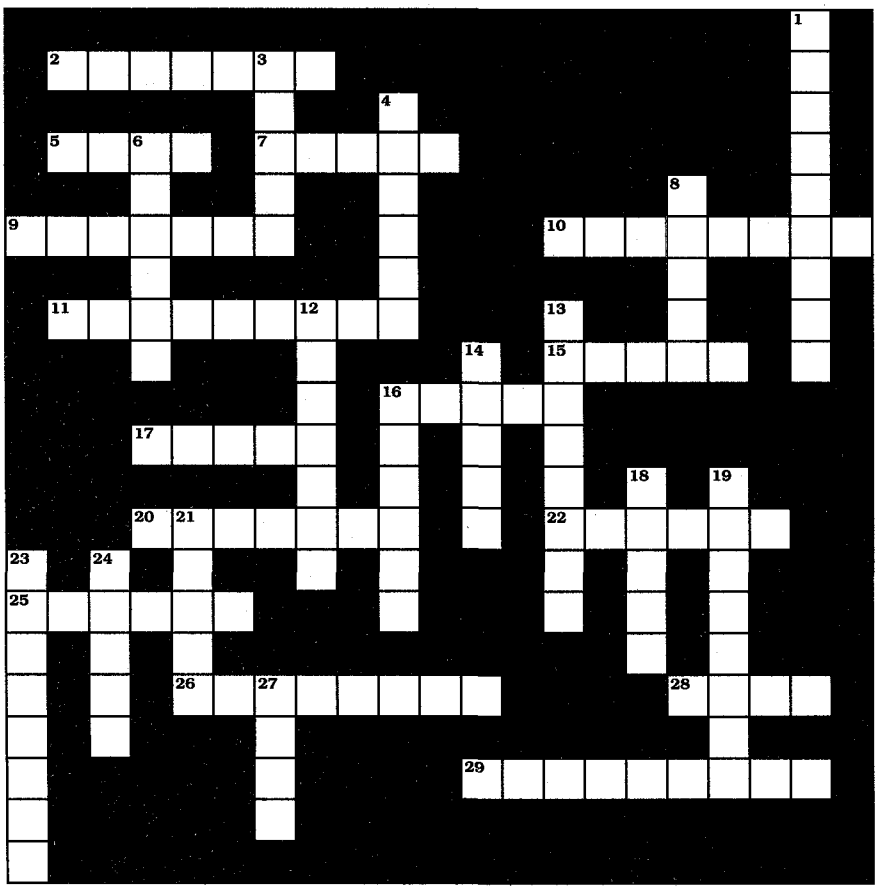

## Across

2. White Bear
5. Henry Andrew Thomas
7. To geld a horse
9. More belly than most
10. Stirrup cover
11. Author of *The Great Taos Bank Robbery*
15. A slow pace
16. Author of *Desperate Men*
17. Tulsa Jack
20. Swalalahist
22. Author of *Starr Tracks*
25. Phoebe Anne Mozee
26. Sitting Bear
28. Henry Plummer's cannibal
29. Texas Jack

## Down

1. Willow Springs' ghost
3. David Lant's partner
4. George Warden "Dad"
6. The back of a saddle
8. Adopted son of Sacajawea
12. Parker's hangman
13. Killed by Kid Curry
14. Author of *Outlaws on Horseback*
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18. Charqui
19. _____ Lake Monster
21. Poker Alice
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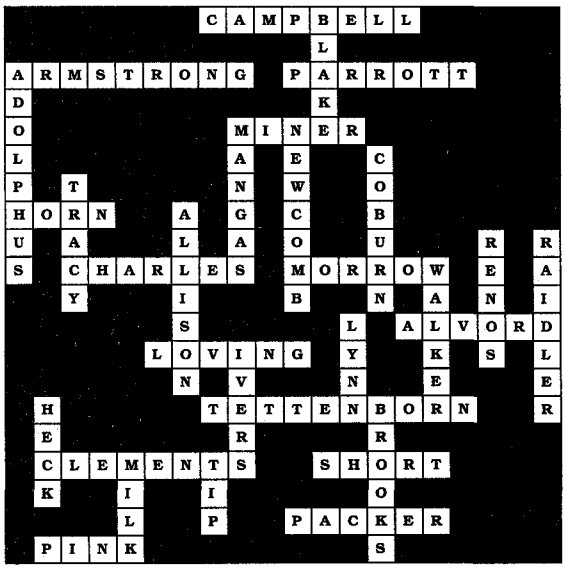
27. Tom Mix's horse




**Solution in next month's True West.**

**Solution to last month's puzzle.**

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***Smallpox!* By Sylvia Wittels, MD.** Smallpox was the first serious human illness to be totally eliminated by vaccination, thanks to a Rio Grande surgeon and his six young patients.

***The Lady Packed a Pistol.* By Cindy K. Keen.** According to Victorian standards, Elsa Jane Forest would have stayed home and baked bread if fate hadn't forced her to go looking for the man who killed her husband.

***Showdown with Shotguns.* By Michael Chegwyn.** A group of California lawmen commandeer a stagecoach in hopes of intercepting a group of shotgun-wielding highwaymen.

***Jesse James: A Product of His Time.* By Jean Ravenscroft.** A young Confederate named Jesse James perfects his ambush, rob, and kill tactics under the skillful eyes of William Quantrill.

***Sleeping in Tombstone: 1880s Style.* By Sherry Monahan.** The wealth of Tombstone, Arizona, was evidenced by the sophisticated lifestyle available to those who could afford the silver town's finest hotels.

***True West Legends: Isaiah W. Lees.* By William B. Secrest.** The life and times of a tough immigrant, lawman, and San Fransisco chief of police.

***Ed Shieffelin's Lost Oregon Gold.* By Roy O'Dell and Barbara Hegne.** Tombstone's founder hits it big one last time on Oregon's Rogue River.

***Highgrade.* By Brad Prouse.** An interview with a hard rock miner exposes a rich vein of knowledge.

**Look for the November issue of *True West* on the newsstand October 1.**



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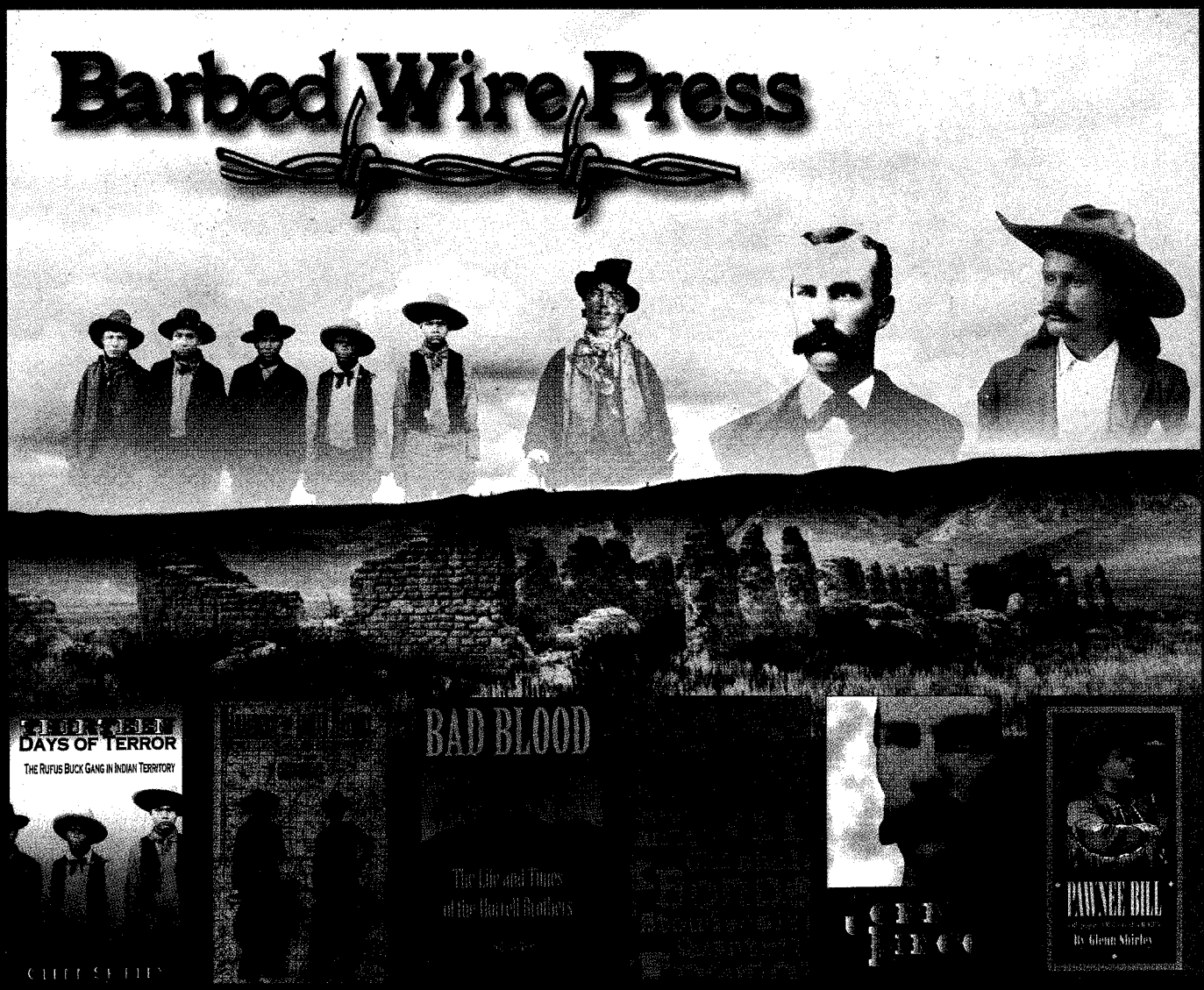


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